Meaning, Perception and Decision-Making

Examining Divisions of Housework in Newly Cohabitating Dual-Earner Couples

by

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ABSTRACT

The division of household tasks has been studied extensively over the past fifty years, but there are unanswered questions about why partners still report imbalances. In this study, I employed a grounded theory research design to systematically collect and analyze data from newly cohabitating, dual-earner couples to generate theory. Three prominent theories (relative resources, time availability and gender ideology) served as the framework for this research. The purpose of this study was to expose the processes of meaning-making, interpretations and decision-making regarding divisions of housework and to determine if, and if so how, dissymmetry in household tasks are understood. My research questions addressed the meanings newly cohabitating couples ascribed to household tasks by and explored how they understand their allocation of these tasks. Eighteen in-depth interviews of six newly cohabitating couples were conducted. Results from the study highlight six major themes that contribute to couples' meaning-making processes regarding housework performance: care, consistency, expectations, gender & upbringing, micromanagement, and task preference. These findings contribute to the broader body of housework literature by demonstrating how grounded theory methods may offer a unique approach to the examination of household task performance. Further, germination of the blended output theory of housework (B.O.T.H.) that emerged from this study could provide an opportunity to better understand changing family structures.

Keywords: housework, domestic labor, equity theory, grounded theory, interpersonal communication, hermeneutic phenomenology

DEDICATION

This is for my two mothers: Laure and Missy. You found ways to constantly remind me that I could be whoever I wanted in life. I learned my sense of authentic care and love from you. I will forever have you with me. I love and miss you both more than meager words or phrases will ever convey.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER Page

CHAPTER Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> No work-family balance will ever fully take hold if the social conditions that might make it possible - men who are willing to share parenting and housework, communities that value work in the home as highly as work on the job, and policymakers and elected officials who are prepared to demand family-friendly reforms - remain out of reach.

-Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, 1997.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to systematically examine newly cohabitating, dual-earner couples' understanding of divisions of housework. More specifically, the aim was to expose the processes of meaning-making, interpretations, and decision-making regarding divisions of housework and to determine if, and if so how, dissymmetry in household tasks are understood. Meaning is challenging to understand but examining the process through which meaning is created facilitate the challenge.

Housework scholars have called for an elaboration of the existing tri-fold (relative resources, time availability and gender perspectives) theoretical frameworks through which many studies have been grounded (Erickson, 2005; Kamo, 2000; Minnotte et al., 2007; Wiesmann et al., 2008). Others have specifically suggested the use of *interactionism* to help explain couples' understanding of divisions of housework (Curan, 2002; Harris, 2001; Pastello & Voydanoff, 1991). Shelton & John (1996) reviewed literature from the 1980s and 1990s and concluded:

> If we take the insights offered by social constructionists and reevaluate our approach to studying household labor and avoid using it to formulate just another

> variable to add to existing models, we may yet achieve better understanding of why the division of household labor is slow to change. (p. 317)

While some scholars have recommended expansions of housework studies on theoretical grounds, others have urged us to move beyond strict, quantitatively-oriented approaches (Bird, 1999; Daly, 2002; Geist & Ruppanner, 2018; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Specifically, some housework scholars (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018) have suggested the recruitment and inclusion of research participants from more nontraditional partnerships, such as cohabitation (p. 243). The current study has followed this suggestion and focused exclusively on cohabitating couples. There has been a drastic decline in reported marriages in the United States of America over the past century. According to J. Cruz of the National Center for Marriage and Family Research, the peak rate of marriages has drastically declined from roughly 92.3% of women reporting being married in 1920 to roughly 46% in 2011 (2013); further, the National Survey of Family Growth showed an increase in unmarried cohabitation with 48% of women interviewed between 2006-2010 reporting having cohabitated with a man versus 34% in 1995 (Copen et al., 2013). A primary aim of this study was to heed both theoretical and methodological calls of the foregoing. From a review of former and contemporary literature on dissymmetry in the division of housework, some elaboration from a *meaning-making* communicative framework seems to have proven useful from the findings of the current study.

Definition of Terms

Though hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory stress allowing meanings to emerge through the collection and analysis of data, it is helpful to set forth an initial

list of terms in the ways they will be used most generally for this study; for these terms are ubiquitous and sometimes conflated in literature on housework.

"Housework" refers to any set of household tasks including, cleaning dishes, doing laundry, folding laundry, taking out the trash, sweeping, mopping, preparing meals, cooking meals, dusting and maintaining lawns.

"Phenomenology" addresses "…the meaning things have in our experience, notably, the significance of objects, events, tools, the flow of time, the self, and others, as these things arise and are experienced in our "life-world" (Smith, 2003).

"Face" describes ". . . the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself or herself from others, by virtue of the relative position he or she occupies in his or her social network and the degree to which he or she is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his or her general conduct" (Ho, 1976)

"Inequity" refers to and exists "for Person whenever his perceived job inputs and/or outcomes stand psychologically in an obverse relation to what he perceives are the inputs and/or outcomes of Other" (as cited in Adams, 1963).

"Person", in the above definition of *inequity,* refers to "any individual for whom equity or inequity exists" (Adams, 1963, p. 424).

"Other," in the above definition of *inequity,* refers to "any individual or group used by Person as a referent when he makes social comparisons of his inputs and outcomes" (Adams, 1963, p. 424).

"Serial Arguments" are "argumentative episodes focused on a given issue that occur at least twice" (Roloff and Johnson, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> Human existence depends on the routine activities that feed, clothe, shelter, and care for both children and adults. In theoretical terms, this family work—or social reproductive labor—is just as important to the maintenance of society as the productive work that occurs in the formal market economy.

-Scott Coltrane, *Research on Household Labor: Modeling and Measuring the Social Embeddedness of Routine Family Work*, 2000.

Introduction

I do not seek a singular definition, meaning and/or understanding of housework, either in a review of the literature or in the study that follows. Equally, I do not seek to assert or impose edicts regarding divisions of housework. Instead, the purpose of this literature review is to examine various theories, viewpoints, beliefs and assumptions about divisions of housework while simultaneously providing possible explanations for why little has changed in the overall development of housework research and potentially the lived experiences of cohabitating couples. Also, this literature review seeks to describe the varied ways divisions of housework have been studied and understood both historically and contextually with a particular eye toward the changes in contemporary family forms. Further, I seek not only to bridge classic theories of divisions of housework with contemporary thoughts, but also to expand these ideas into a theoretical framework that allows one to explore meaning-making processes between individuals in newly cohabitating, unmarried partnerships.

Research on divisions of housework is well established. During the last several decades, various fields from communication to philosophy have considered the subject

(see Coltrane, 2000; Geist and Ruppanner, 2018; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010; Shelton and John, 1996, for reviews of research from the early 1990s to present). The complexities of social relations are made salient (Coltrane, 2000) and affirmed (Blair-Loy et al., 2015) in examinations of housework. Although all findings on divisions of housework are not historically identical, patterns have emerged across decades of research.

A number of studies have suggested that in American households, women continue to perform a large majority of unpaid household tasks regardless of whether or not they are part of a dual-earner arrangement (Artis and Pavalko, 2003; Erickson, 2005; Fuwa, 2004; Mannino and Deutsch, 2007; Pinto and Coltrane, 2009) (see Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer and Robinson, 2000 for a comparison of overall housework decline amongst both men and women from 1965-1995). These tasks can range from routine (e.g., daily and ongoing tasks such as doing laundry and preparing meals for the family) to non-routine (e.g., infrequent tasks that can be postponed, like cleaning the recycle bin) (Coltrane, 2000), with some studies suggesting that women perform most of the routine tasks within the household while men perform most of the non-routine tasks (Fuwa and Cohen, 2007; Sullivan, 2000). This imbalance has effects.

Both women and men are negatively impacted by housework dissymmetry, but because women have historically performed the majority of housework, they may bear the greater burden. Studies have found a relationship between women who perceive inequity in divisions of housework and decreased levels of their health (Thomas, Laguda, Olufemi-Ayoola, Netzley, Yu and Spitzmueller, 2018), increased levels of depression (Bird, 1999; Grote and Clark, 2001, Schafer and Keith, 1980), increased levels of marital

conflict (Kluwer, Heesink and Van De Vliert, 1996), decreased levels of relationship satisfaction (Barstad, 2014) and an increase in the likelihood of divorce (Ruppanner, Branden and Turunen, 2018). As a consequence, it is important to understand the ongoing and unresolved problem of dissymmetry in housework.

The complex phenomenon of housework dissymmetry between individuals who cohabitate, and the evident gender imbalances therein, has generated several theoretical frameworks, a few key theories, much discussion and a large amount of research aimed at better understanding discrepancies in the division of housework (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010). Both macro and micro-level accounts of housework have been advanced.

Generally, macro-level perspectives have been concerned with how cultural and structural forces such as public policies (e.g., publicly funded childcare, parental leave, and affirmative-action) help shape interactions in homes, especially how housework is allocated between members of a couple (Batalova and Cohen, 2002; Hook, 2006). Though the current study does not aim to fully integrate macro-level perspectives, it proceeds with a constant and iterative regard for how important these perspectives are to our understanding of *private matters* of the home (Wood, 1998). Three micro-level theories/perspectives have emerged as foundational to the study of housework: *relative resources model*, *time availability hypothesis* and *gender ideology*. I will describe and explain the general tenets and key findings of these perspectives, as they have been cornerstones for the study of housework. Then, I will proceed to discuss atypical theoretical frameworks in hopes of providing a response to gaps in the theories

mentioned above along with addressing the importance of communication in understanding the unresolved problem of dissymmetry in housework.

Prominent Theories of Housework Allocation

Relative Resources (economic exchange hypothesis, economic dependence model):

The *relative resources* perspective maintains that divisions of housework are inextricably linked to power differences between men and women; levels of resources (e.g., income, education and socioeconomic status) determine the amount of housework that the wife and husband perform (Blood and Wolf, 1960; Brines, 1994). A key underlying assumption of this perspective is that housework is generally understood by couples as unpleasant and therefore undesirable (Mannino and Deutsch, 2007). Consequently, wives and husbands attempt to negotiate their way out of performing housework (Shelton, 1996), and the more power, or *relative resources*, one has, the more likely it is one will be able to bargain about housework and (ultimately) out of tasks that they prefer not to perform (Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 1996). Although this theory has appeared in studies of housework dating back to the 1960s, it has not gone without strong critique.

Some scholars have argued against the linear relationship between *relative resources* and the division of housework (Bittman et al., 2003; Greenstein, 2000) while others have taken issue with the more fundamental assumptions this theory holds. Ferree (1990) stresses that housework is a complex symbolic interaction that cannot be reduced to a set of exchanges, whether implicit or explicit. Wood (2011) furthers this point when arguing "I am not convinced that most personal relationships operate as commercial enterprises in which individuals count costs and rewards" (p. 45). Although some studies

have supported the assumptions of the relative resources model (Fuwa, 2004; Knudson and Waerness, 2008), important issues exist that necessitate consideration of why women who possess similar, if not more, relative resources than their husbands may still perform greater amounts of housework (Evertsson and Nermo, 2007). This discrepancy is an important aspect of housework dissymmetry, which this study intends to complicate by uncovering what housework represents, symbolizes and ultimately means for cohabitating couples through paired in-depth interviews (Arksey, 1996). This approach of conducting interviews focused on communication patterns, shared and individual meaning making processes, and the symbolism involved in the performance of housework may prove valuable in extending not only the economic exchange hypothesis but housework research altogether.

Time Availability Perspective/Hypothesis:

The time-availability perspective centers on an interplay between the time each partner works inside and outside of the house (Davis et al., 2007) whereby partners make rational decisions regarding who does which household task based on the time they each have available (Coverman, 1985; South and Spitze, 1994). Each partner, in a dual-earner marriage, is involved in multiple domains; housework is one of these domains. One key assumption of this theory is that time is a finite resource that is negotiated between the various domains of a couple's life; thus, the greater the time demands in one domain (paid work outside of the home), the less time one has in other domains, such as unpaid housework (Coverman, 1985, England & Farkas, 1986). This perspective is often presented as being gender neutral, because each partner has the potential for varying amounts of time in various social domains (Hook, 2006). A study by Bianchi et al. (2000)

found that both partners' time at work influences the amount of housework they perform. Other studies have found that the more hours a woman spends outside of the home (in paid work) the fewer hours she spends performing household tasks (Minnino and Deutsch, 2007; Pinto and Coltrane, 2009) and the more potential time her partner has to perform household tasks (Nooman et al., 2007). Related studies reveal that women do less housework by outsourcing some of it (hiring cleaners, buying prepared food). In fact, studies that show the gap between husbands' and wives' household labor contributions narrowing attributes much of this change to the decrease in women's contributions rather than an increase in men's (Bianchi et al., 2000). I am curious to determine if this pattern is shifting among younger generations.

Bartley et al. (2005) found that when both partners were full-time workers outside of the home, women tended to perform more housework than their husbands. Others have argued quite successfully that women often perform several forms of *work* that are not relegated to paid labor outside of the home. In fact, in her groundbreaking book *The Second Shift*, Arlie Hoschschild found that women are not only responsible for paid work outside of the home but when their shift is finished in that domain they are then often responsible for another *shift* at home performing various household tasks (1989). Lincoln (2008) found that when controlling for time spent in the paid labor force (both partners work a similar number of hours outside of the home), women were found to put roughly 80% of their time into unpaid housework as they did in their paid employment whereas men's proportion of unpaid housework to paid work was 60%.

While these findings are telling, Bianchi et al. (2000) found more nuanced results, which were rooted in both differences in the types of housework dual-earner wives and

husbands performed and the relative income of both partners. Similarly, other researchers suggest that the *time availability perspective* does not adequately account for the many types of labor performed in both domains of contemporary American households (Geist and Ruppanner, 2018). Specifically, Geist and Ruppanner (2018) argue that the *time availability perspective* does not consider care work, emotional labor, nonstandard work hours, work from home arrangements, irregular work hours or the concept of *flexibilization of labor* (Blair-Loy et al., 2015, Hochschild, 1989). Flexibilization is the practice of employers moving from hiring more permanent employees to temporary or so-called "flexible" workers. The process of *flexibilization* unfavorably impacts employees in these positions because often they are sub-contracted and are not afforded the same benefits as more permanent employees, such as health care, maternal and paternal leave; women more often occupy these positions (Hoq et al., 2009).

Gender Ideology (gender construction perspective):

Gender ideology theory has a long history (see West and Zimmerman, 1987) in explaining human behavior. An essential characteristic of this perspective is that we are socialized into gender (Cunningham, 2001) and that this social construction happens across a continuum that ranges from traditional gender roles to more egalitarian roles (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010). Some research findings suggest that an inclination towards more traditional gender roles, regardless of whether the man and/or the woman assumes a traditional understanding of gender roles, results in women performing disproportionality more housework than their husbands (Arrighi and Maume, 2000; Davis et al., 2007; Fuwa, 2004; Knudsen and Waerness, 2008; Parkman, 2004). Twiggs et al. (1999) determined that when men, specifically, have a more egalitarian way

of thinking they also tend to take on more of the household tasks. Although the gender gap in housework can said to be narrowing (Bianchi, et al., 2000; Sullivan et al., 2015), research findings still suggest women are performing the majority of housework tasks (England, 2010) such that women have been found to perform 1.6 times the amount of housework that men perform (Bianchi et al., 2012).

Gender, as a social construct, is deeply embedded in not only how we see ourselves in relationship to others but also how we embody and enact these identities (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Because of the utter ubiquitous and intricate quality of gender as an ideologically social construct, many researchers have charged housework scholars to think more critically about how the gender ideology perspective is employed in both qualitative and quantitative studies (Coltrane, 2000; Geist and Ruppanner, 2018; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010). Specifically, Geist and Ruppanner (2018) argue that gender inequity in housework endures and that the long-standing theoretical trifecta (Relative Resources, Time Availability and Gender Ideology) have not been sufficient to explain housework inequities in the many variations of contemporary households (p. 247). Indeed, they invite us to more strongly consider dual-breadwinner partnerships, same-sex couples, non-partnered families, cohabitating couples and the growing demand to include class, race, ethnicity, and sexual identity as intersecting categories of analysis when addressing inequities in housework (Geist and Ruppanner, 2018). The current study, though limited in scope, will heed this call by focusing on newly cohabitating, dual-earner couples, which may illuminate their lived experiences and help expand housework literature regarding gender ideology and family composition.

This study intends to address questions regarding the relationship of identity and gender performance. Specifically, I seek to determine if the ways in which newly cohabitating couples divide housework fits neatly into a female/male binary system: a system that has been espoused through a variety of fields of scientific inquiry since the 1800s. This system divides humans into categories of either women or men, and the performed identities of gender often have been discussed along this binary as well. Another way to understand identity is through an *iterative* approach, which suggests that gender is partially formed through a process of individuals regularly oscillating between their internalized perception of self and how their partner perceives them; therefore, gender can be thought of as being constantly negotiated as partners adapt their understanding and enactment of gender based not only on each other but on the broader social communities in which they are associated (Geist and Ruppanner, 2018). This approach more closely aligns with a social constructionist view of gender as social "activity" or "doing gender" (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987) rather than as something based entirely on sex, which has been argued as more or less fixed and rooted in biology, but even this notion has been challenged in recent decades (Hyde et al., 2018). By allowing gender to be regarded as occurring on a continuum (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010), constantly negotiated or "*iterative"* (Geist and Ruppanner, 2018) and ultimately amenable to change (Brewster, 2015; Daly, 2002; Erickson, 2005; Twiggs et al., 1999; Wood, 2011), housework scholars may be better primed to consider the performance of gender in all of its complexity.

Complementary Perspectives and Orientations: Toward a Theoretically Blended Model of Housework

In acknowledging appeals for extending previous research and theoretical frameworks, I move to integrate four different perspectives that can explain the division of housework while not neglecting the long-standing theories discussed above. The following will serve as an overview of each of these four perspectives 1) *Integrated Theory of the Division of Domestic Labor* [with particular focus on the concept of "threshold"] 2) *Symbolic Interaction* 3) Nel Noddings on *care* [with particular focus on the concept of "engrossment" and "motivational displacement"] 4) Arlie Hochschild's *Economy of Gratitude*.

Integrated Theory of the Division of Domestic Labor

Alberts and colleagues developed *The Integrated Theory of the Division of Domestic Labor* (ITDDL) (Alberts, et al., 2011) in response to the lack of frameworks addressing divisions of household labor beyond single explanations. Said differently, most of the literature on divisions of household labor attempts to explain the phenomenon through one contextual lens. As the name suggests, ITDDL is meant to be multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. It includes several anchoring theories and principles deriving from other theoretical frameworks. Specifically, ITDDL finds its roots in evolutionary/bio-social theory, social exchange theory and gender theory while some anchoring principles are threshold levels, sense-making and communication, and *economy of gratitude*. I will briefly discuss each of these theories and principles.

An evolutionary approach to division of housework see a women's senses, specifically sense of smell, as primary to understanding why they may more likely to

perform the vast majority of household tasks. This theory suggests women's keen sense of smell has evolved in such a way that women have adapted to smell foul odor stemming from uncleanliness; therefore, in theory, women are/were primed to be sensitive to the grime of a household and, consequently, more likely to perform tasks that would effectively eliminate the dirt. The bio-social approach runs contrary to the above. It posits that women have been socialized to be in the house performing household tasks and, consequently, may have developed more refined senses.

Threshold levels are related to the theories above in that one's sensitivity (or tolerance, or threshold sensitivity) has evolved and adapted into varied inclinations towards different stimuli. Specifically, threshold sensitivity, as it relates to stimuli in households, is what determines whether or not an individual will react to environmental stimuli. For example, a person with low threshold sensitivity will react quicker to environmental stimuli (such as a sink with dirty dishes) than someone who may have high threshold sensitivity. Although some of the initial work in threshold levels was conducted using bees, this part of ITDDL is integral to help explain how/why individuals may or may not react to varying degrees of perceived uncleanliness.

Social exchange theory essentially argues that most every human interaction is based on inputs and outputs, costs and rewards; it gauges human interaction through the lens of utility. For example, one may decide to perform certain household tasks based on one's own contributions (or investments) in the relationship. If one feels they pay most of the household expenses, they may opt-out of performing routine household tasks. A basic assumption of social exchange theory rests on the idea of "reinforcement," which is that "a resource will continue to flow only if there is a valued return contingent upon it"

(Emerson, 1976). This is important for the current study, because if couples feel rewarded for their performance of housework, they may be more likely to continue it. That is, a partner's expression of appreciation and acknowledgement may serve as important rewards that substitute for household labor and thus create "balance" in the social exchange system.

ITDDL recognizes the tenets of social exchange theory as useful but embeds them in a larger framework that helps to address some of the challenges of social exchange theory: one challenge being how can the theory account for dual-earner couples who contribute equally to household expenses, but where women inevitably still perform the majority of unpaid household labor.

Gender theory is an additional theory that is significant in rooting ITDDL. This theory (or framework, as it comes out of a long historical line of theories and theorists) essentially proposes that gender is a social construction and that women and men are socialized into *doing gender*. Specifically, and in the context of the division of household labor, women may tend to take on and sometimes identify with gender roles that are characteristic of a particular society. For example, if cooking and cleaning is characteristic of women in a particular culture and a woman identifies with this social construction, she may be more inclined to engage in housework than would a man whose socially constructed identity does not include these characteristics.

Economy of gratitude (Hothschild, 2003) posits that when an individual contributes that is perceived as over and beyond what is typically expected, the recipient often feels and expresses appreciation. However, perceptions of what counts as a gift may vary. In terms of the performance of housework between dual-earner partners,

dissymmetry may occur when one partner perceives that her or his employment is as a gift while the other partner perceives they are *giving* a gift by "allowing" the other partner to work. For example, Rihanna and Sean may both be employed full-time outside of the home and struggle with issues of dissymmetry of housework if Sean interprets Rihanna's work outside of the house as a something he is "allowing" her to do (a gift to her). Therefore, Sean may, then, perceive Rihanna's work outside of the house as supplemental to her expected performance of housework. Similarly, if a partner perceives that his or her performance of household labor should be seen as a gift (in that it is not expected) and should engender appreciation while the partner views that performance as expected, and perhaps insufficient. If this is so, it seems to make sense (and as ITDDL poses) that men, generally speaking, may not find issue with women working full-time and doing the majority of the housework because the value of a woman's paid work outside of the home is diminished because he is "allowing" her to work; in addition, men may not recognize the amount of work women perform both outside and inside of the home. Perhaps more importantly, a partner's household labor may not be seen as a gift but as something that is expected – and therefore is something one takes for granted.

ITDDL also focuses on sense-making and communication in that it seeks to explain how couples make sense of, negotiate, and understand divisions of housework. This is another significant feature of the integrated theory, because it recognizes that although couples may find themselves in a society that is constructed of gendered ways of seeing the world, they may adopt a variety of roles that fall outside the gender-binary.

Next, I will briefly discuss two studies that have employed ITDDL. One study was focus-group based and aimed to understand students' behaviors towards divisions of housework in same-sex dorms. This study found that males tended to view housework in a necessity-based way; put differently, this study showed that males typically did housework when they felt they needed to either because their dorm had gotten too dirty or to *save face* if someone was coming over. On the other hand, females in the study reported they approached housework as more of a routine, meaning they performed household tasks regularly (O'Colemain & Alberts, 2008; Riforgiate, 2011) This finding may explain the results of other studies that determined routine household tasks are typically performed by women (dishes, cooking cleaning and laundry) whereas tasks that are more infrequent and sometimes less time consuming are performed by men (yard work, taking out trash, cleaning the garage) (Bianchi et al., 2000; Batalova et al., 2002; Kroska, 2004).

The second study (Knight, Alberts, 2018) addressed threshold sensitivity differences and demand/withdraw patterns in married couples. Researchers found a relationship between differences in individuals' threshold sensitivity and enactment of demand/withdraw conflict, with greater differences in threshold levels associated with greater frequency of demand/withdraw conflict behavior. The findings from these studies help me root my own work in the division of household labor by providing me with an initial start for utilizing ITDDL to better understand the phenomenon of dissymmetry between individuals' performance of household tasks. I am particularly interested in how threshold levels may help better explain this phenomenon.

Symbolic interaction

Symbolic interaction (also known as social construction, constructionism and/or interactionism) originated from several thinkers, including Mead (1934), Schutz (1932), Blumer (1931) and later Goffman (1951) Berger and Luckman (1966). Interactionism is fundamentally routed in social interaction involving "the mutual sending, receiving, reading, and interpreting of significant symbols, both verbal and nonverbal" (Turner, 2002). Another key feature of interactionism is the recognition that meaning is socially constructed (Berger and Luckman, 1966) and consequently that any phenomenon under analysis must be understood in terms of interpretive processes occurring not only at a macro-social (institutional) level, but also at the micro-social level where dyadic interactions occur. Cancian (1995) contends that social phenomena are not necessarily things "waiting to be discovered or reduced" as much as they are labels "that reflect the perspective of the labeler." How and why individuals create meaning and build perspective about any given phenomenon is imperative in understanding the phenomenon itself. Put differently, and according to interactionist-informed qualitative research, one is cautioned against focusing strictly on the phenomenon itself (in this case, division of housework) and inferring based on observation alone; instead, one is urged to engage those who may have direct experience with phenomenon at hand in an attempt to better understand how they construct meaning about the phenomenon and what the phenomenon represents to/for them. Therefore, divisions of housework, according to interactionism, are not initially assumed or taken for granted as dissymmetric, imbalanced and/or inequitable because no phenomenon possesses inherent meaning; social phenomena will always require some interpretive construction (Blumer, 1969, p.

3). Thus, the current study, first, is concerned with establishing what dimensions of housework are relevant for couples and how interpretations of relevance may be constituted and co-constituted through macro-social, meso-structural and micro-social processes. Put simply, from an interactionism viewpoint, this study is primarily interested in exploring the meanings *housework* has for newly cohabitating couples along with how initial interactions and behaviors regarding divisions of housework may serve as catalysts for more long-term, sustained types of interactions.

Researchers from various fields have taken an interactionist approach to the study of housework. Daly (2002) and his research team conducted 50 in-depth semi-structured interviews with seventeen heterosexual dual-earner couples regarding their understanding of housework. The interviews comprised open-ended questions that centered on how families experienced time, with a particular focus on the themes of "the meaning of family time, differences between men and women with regard to experiences of time, negotiation over time, and pace of life" (2002). He found that couples made meaning of housework through a lens of time; more specifically, time was essential not only in carrying out household duties but also in the informal and formal negotiations that proceeded such performance of housework. Additionally, Daly found couples' definitions of time were gender-based and although men contributed to time negotiations, women typically took the lead and "were responsible for monitoring, initiating, and coordinating their joint action as a couple" (2002, p. 339). Some female participants reported feeling a sense of burden from this multi-dimensional set of responsibilities, while others tended to find power in the management of these tasks.

Daly's findings were not entirely unique, in that many scholars have taken a time availability perspective in understanding divisions of housework (Coverman, 1985, England & Farkas, 1986), but a key finding from his work was that women demonstrated a propensity to internalize and sometimes even blame themselves for the unsuccessful negotiation of housework; further, Daly found that women were inclined to compartmentalize housework, and the negotiation therein, into a strictly private matter that did not include broader social factors (2002). Put differently, according to Daly, women defined issues related to divisions of housework as personal and independent of outside forces or factors that may have influenced their understanding of housework.

In spite of Daly's findings, Pastello and Voydanoff (1991) urge housework researchers to bridge the private/public dichotomy gap to better understand how families "interpret, adjust, construct and reconstruct the division of tasks in the household" (p. 123). They contend that although housework is coordinated by individuals in families, meaning-making is mediated by both our private and public lives; the space in which private and public merge, according to Pastello and Voydanoff, is the so-called mesostructure. For Pastello and Voydanoff, families are shaped by both internal and external factors and mechanisms such as gender, power, and stratification that connect the individual family to the broader public. Similarly, Turner (2002) suggests that emotional, transactional, symbolic, role, status, ecological, and demographic forces are all integral in understanding meaning-making of individuals, families, communities, states, and nations. Interactionism can provide a conceptual means through which housework researchers can examine how meaning is derived, interpreted, adjusted,

constructed and reconstructed in dyads, families and in a broader society, and how meaning influences how labor is divided in households.

Nel Nodding's on Care

Nel Noddings's moral theory of care ethics is rooted in our *relationship* with others and may serve as a sensitizing concept for the current study. Her approach stems from a branch of philosophy called normative ethics, which considers ways we *should* behave towards and with one another. Noddings proposes a particular framework of how we *ought to* treat one another that is different than classical forms of normative ethics in that she does not approach *care* as a *mathematical*, rule-governed, treatise on duties that are constituted by stern principles. Likewise, I think this study may suggest ways in which divisions of housework between newly cohabitating couples may not be bound by definitive arrangement and explicit decision-making processes, or, similarly, as rule governed. Importantly, Noddings wants to differentiate her care ethics from some conventional forms of ethical treatments that she maintains have been mostly underpinned by masculine sensibilities. She writes, "One might say that ethics has been discussed largely in the language of the father: in principles and propositions, in terms such as justification, fairness, justice. The mother's voice has been silent" (p. 1). Noddings animates her philosophical ethics of care within a *feminine spirit*: 'feminine' "in the deep classical sense---rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" (p. 2). These concepts of receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness, in the context of divisions of housework, invite questions about how couples may engage in communication practices that fall more in line with Noddings's *feminine spirit*. I think these concepts may be integral in the building of a more equitable and caring home,

which would, then, seem to improve overall relationship satisfaction between individuals in cohabitating partnerships. Care, as being rooted in feminine sensibilities, is fundamental to Noddings' ethics because it provides, for her, an alternative approach through which to better understand a moral life.

Now that attention has been paid to the foundation from which Nodding's builds her ethics of care and how this foundation may help to serve as the backdrop for this study in divisions of housework, I will briefly discuss her framework and its central concepts of *the one-caring* and *the cared-for*; further, I will discuss Noddings' ideas of *engrossment and motivational displacement,* as these concepts are enmeshed in her ideas of *the one-caring* and *the cared-for*. Additionally, I will address a particular criticism of her ethics of care, which hinges on a seeming lack of address regarding how self-care may be effectively subdued through the process of *engrossment*. *The one*-caring, the *cared-for* and Noddings' concepts of engrossment and motivational displacement may help to not only illuminate the unresolved problem of dissymmetry in housework, but how communication may serve as fundamental to a praxis of care.

In a dyadic sense, Noddings approaches her care ethics, at least for the purposes of the current study on newly cohabitating couples, as occurring between two people: *the one-caring* and *the cared-for*. As her terms suggest, *the one-caring* is the person through which *care* is directed from and *the cared-for* is the person to which care is directed. For Noddings, it is in a *moment of care* that *the one-caring* may be opened to *receiving the cared-for*. This process of opening involves a level of feeling and sensitivity. We can think of this process as an empathic process, but Noddings wants to make clear that she sees empathy as reception, in the more feminine sense of the term, as opposed to

projection, which she sees as a more western and masculine understanding of the term (p. 30). Therefore, when *the one-caring* is in a *moment of care* for *the cared-for*, the former is said to, according to Noddings, "feel with," "receive the other" and/or be "engrossed" in *the cared-for*.

The *one-caring* can be thought of as being in a "receptive or relational mode" when "engrossment" occurs, which is essentially being open to and aware of the *cared-for's* position and/or place. Though, it is important to note the temporality and varying intensity of transactions of care and *engrossment* from *the one-caring* to *the cared-for*. According to Noddings, the *moment of care* and the attending *reception of the other* can be "a few moments or a lifetime" (p. 40). For example, one may perform seemingly menial tasks around the house while the partner is ill or make more serious gestures, such as giving a vital organ to the partner. I am most interested in the everyday moments when couples have opportunities to *feel with* and, therefore, be more caring towards each other especially when it concerns issues like perceived dissymmetry in divisions of housework that may deeply affect one or both individuals. An *everyday moment* may be something such as a partner, we will call Kanye, knowing the other partner, we will call Kim, will be coming home from a particularly challenging day at work and doing the other partner's laundry before they get home, as to make it easier on them when they arrive home. A *moment of care* can manifest in various ways and intensities through an instance of *engrossment*.

The *one-caring*, i.e., Kanye who does the laundry before Kim arrives home, may have what Noddings characterizes as an internal state of *engrossment* because he has contemplated Kim's well-being. For Noddings, e*ngrossment* is a state or sensibility

unique to *the one-caring*, but her *care ethics* also involves *the cared-for*. She describes a process of *the one-caring* and the *cared-for* in this way, "Something from A must be received, completed, in B. Generally, we characterize this something as an attitude. . .The cared-for responds to the presence of the one-caring" (p. 19, 60). Engrossment, for Noddings, must be completed in *the cared-for* in order to find the optimal level of care, and receptivity therein.

Noddings specifies that *engrossment* occurs mainly for the *one-caring* because their intentions are directed "outward" towards the *cared*-for. She also requires that the *one-caring* experience or engage in what she calls "motivational displacement," which is when the *one-caring* focuses on the needs of the other over their own. Noddings specifically describes motivational displacement happening when "motive energy begins toward meeting the needs expressed by the cared for" (Noddings, 214).

The *cared*-for is also situated within the criteria for what Noddings posits as proper care. For Noddings, the *cared-for* must not only be open to receiving care but they must also respond to the *one-caring* to indicate they have actually been cared for; she characterizes this process of engrossment within the *one-caring* and recognition of care from the *cared-for* as being "completed in the other" (p. 4). I will use the previous example to clarify Noddings's criteria for care. First, Kanye's intentions must be, according to Noddings, directed outwards towards Kim in an effort to better understand and "feel" with her. Second, Kim must also indicate for Kanye that she has been *cared-for*. For example, Kanye may be considered *engrossed* because he pre-reflectively considers that Kim has had a long day and may want to rest and not worry about laundry when she gets home; thus, he does the laundry. Further, Kim may recognize Kanye's

gesture by saying to him, “I really appreciate you doing the laundry tonight, so I can rest easier tonight”. Finally, Kanye can be thought of as engaging in *motivational displacement* because he seemed to have put Kim’s needs overs his own. Here, we see how *engrossment* may serve as a specific sensitizing concept for how partners may be aware, or not, of the other partner’s well-being.

Although *engrossment* is fundamental to Noddings’s care ethics, it has not gone without criticism. As illustrated above, *engrossment* is essentially a move from self-focus into other-focus. Holding to a strict view of this may lead to a state of *self-erasure* by the *one-caring*. Further, and although Noddings’s imbues her care ethics with feminist sentimentality, one may find her concept of *engrossment* as yet another enactment of traditional gender roles where women are caretakers for men specifically, and households generally. Noddings’s own words may prove instructive for understanding *engrossment* in the ways mentioned just previously. She states, “Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s. When we care, we consider the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects from us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves” (p. 24). She goes further to suggest that for *the one-caring* “we act not to achieve for ourselves a commendation but to protect or enhance the welfare of the cared-for” (p. 24), and that “I am. . . .somehow fulfilled and completed in my own life and in the lives of those I have thus influenced” (p. 95). Indeed, one may interpret the very notion of *engrossment* and *motivational displacement* as, again, the *one-caring* vacating their own self-interests, personal needs and perhaps even their own self-care in place of caring for the other. Nodding’s seems to

anticipate this type of interpretation of *engrossment,* and she both directly and indirectly acknowledges such throughout her book.

When discussing the social construction of gender and the roles women and men take in many households, Nodding's permits that "women are too often cast as the one-caring; they are the ones who engage in psychological caring" (p. 127). In her discussion of possible *problems arising in the analysis of one-caring,* she readily acknowledges "As I think about how I feel when I care, about what my frame of mind is, I see that my caring is always characterized by a move away from self" (p. 16). While Noddings both anticipates and acknowledges possible shortcomings in her ideas of *engrossment* and *motivational displacement* specifically, and her ethics of care even more broadly, she also tempers some of this throughout her text by offering caring as both reflective and reflexive; she emphasizes the importance of considering care as occurring between, more than towards.

Multiple parts of the text illustrate Nodding's oscillation from a strict *towards* mode of care to a more *between* mode of *joint-care*. For example, she says the "essential elements of caring are located in the relation between the one-caring and the cared-for" (p. 9) and that "what we do depends. . .upon a constellation of conditions that is viewed through both the eyes of the one-caring and the eyes of the cared-for" (p. 13). Further, Nodddings grants that "An ethic of caring is a tough ethic. It does not separate self and other in caring. . .we are fragile; we depend upon each other even for our own goodness" (pp. 99, 102). She deepens and illustrates the subtleties of her care ethics in stating, "The ethical self does not live partitioned off from the rest of the person. . .there is no way to disregard the self, or to remain impartial, or to adopt the stance of a disinterested

observer" (p. 100). Not losing oneself in another seems important, but perhaps an understated feature, in Noddings's ethics of care.

In my mind, balancing care for others with care for self is complicated in theory and even more complicated in practice. It seems, in my mind at least, that Noddings makes a fair attempt at illustrating a balance by suggesting that caring may be, at base, shared and if it is shared, both the caring and cared-for benefit in some way. Softening the edges, we find in dialectic tensions is no minor project. Philosophers and lay alike have undertaken such endeavors for millennia. We, as humans, are connected yet separate: alike, yet distinct: joined, yet divorced. The inevitability of this paradox may encumber thought directed towards such ethical projects as care, kindness and compassion. Noddings' ethics of care, at minimum, as does Buber's distinction between "I-it" and "I-thou," prompts us to recognize each other as alike in some respects. Further, it lays some ground to have us, then, perform the extremely challenging work of moving beyond our(selves) to aid others. An unresolvable question that many who are motivated by *an ethics* face, however, including Noddings herself, is a question of intervention. How are we to *know* an(other) requires aid, and even if/when we come to this understanding, at what point do we intervene in an(others) life and in what ways, and to what effect?

Research Questions

RQ 1: What do household tasks mean for newly cohabitating couples?

RQ 2: Are certain domains of housework more or less meaningful for newly cohabitating couples?

RQ 3: How do newly cohabiting couples conceptualize allocation of household tasks?

RQ 4: How do newly cohabitating couples view their current allocations of household tasks?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

> [For the phenomenologist. . .there is nothing more meaningful than the quest for the origin, presentation, and meaning of meaning.
>
> -Max Van Manen, Phenomenology of Practice, 2014.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to systematically examine newly cohabitating, dual-earner couples' understanding of divisions of housework. More specifically, my aim was to expose the processes of meaning-making, interpretations and decision-making regarding divisions of housework and to determine if, and if so how, dissymmetry in household tasks are understood in order to make better sense of why divisions of housework may still be unbalanced. Meaning is challenging to understand but examining the process through which meaning is created assisted in responding to this the challenge. Housework scholars have called for an elaboration of the existing tri-fold theoretical frameworks through which many studies have been grounded (Erickson, 2005; Kamo, 2000; Minnotte et al., 2007; Wiesmann et al., 2008) while others have specifically suggested the use of *interactionism* to help explain couples' understanding of divisions of housework (Curan, 2002; Harris, 2001; Pastello & Voydanoff, 1991). Shelton & John (1996) reviewed literature from the 1980s and 1990s and concluded:

> If we take the insights offered by social constructionists and reevaluate our approach to studying household labor and avoid using it to formulate just another variable to add to existing models, we may yet achieve better understanding of why the division of household labor is slow to change. (p. 317)

While some scholars have recommended expansions of housework studies on theoretical grounds, others have urged us to move beyond strict quantitatively-oriented approaches (Bird, 1999; Daly, 2002; Geist & Ruppanner, 2018; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). A primary aim of this study was to heed both theoretical and methodological calls of the foregoing. From a review of former and contemporary literature on dissymmetry in the division of housework, some elaboration from a *meaning-making* communicative framework has proven useful.

Research Design Rationale

From my examination of previous and contemporary literature on the topic of divisions of housework, there seemed to be space for a phenomenological account of not only how we understand performance of housework, but also how we come to understand this performance. Although the theoretical frameworks discussed thus far have had significant appeal and widespread influence in shaping our understanding of divisions of housework and the performance thereof, a framework that assesses individuals' daily lived experiences had the potential to advance the topic even further by offering an alternative to the traditional research designs used by most housework scholars. Grounded theory and phenomenology are alternative methods to traditional housework approaches, in that they seek to work from the participants' understanding of the phenomenon outward (and back again), and not the converse. For example, many traditional housework studies have relied on theoretically quantifiable design measures such as the specific number of hours wives and husbands spend on housework tasks, which is a way of starting with a variable related to the phenomenon and extrapolating outward to the phenomenon or using a deductive approach. This approach is meant to

measure, predict and control while a goal of grounded theory and phenomenology, generally speaking, is to understand the why and how of a phenomenon. The current study sought to better understand not only what participants thought about the phenomenon of housework, but also the how and why they came to this understanding.

Use of Terminology:

Though hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory tend towards allowing meanings to emerge through the collection and analysis of data, it is helpful to set forth an initial list of terms in the ways they will be used most generally in this study; for these terms are ubiquitous and sometimes conflated in literature on housework.

In the development of this study, I was careful to not use certain terms that may automatically assume or suggest a particular understanding or grounding of the phenomenon at hand. For example, much of the literature on performance of household tasks are characterized under the general labels of either "housework" or "domestic labor" and sometimes "chores" (Blood & Wolfe, 1965; Fee, 1976; Coverman, 1983; Greenstein, 1996). These classifications take for granted the intricacies of what is otherwise subsumed through the very process of labeling to begin with.

While I recognize the value of parsimonious research and I also understand the limits of language, employing terms such as *housework* and *domestic labor* may limit how research participants and researchers understand this complex phenomenon. For example, the term "housework" can imply some level of toil and it also seems to relegate our attention almost exclusively to a domain of dwelling or residence when, in fact, the phenomenon under analysis often includes aspects outside of the "house" such as grocery shopping, paying bills (although this can be done online either inside or outside of the

"house") childcare, etcetera. Similarly, the terms "domestic labor", which derive from early 14th century Old French *domestique* "belonging to the household," and 14th century Old French *labor* meaning "toil, work, exertion, task; tribulation, suffering" (www.etymonline.com) has their inherent connotative implications.

Household tasks can also have many connotative associations similar to the aforementioned. Though, in my mind, a *task* engenders some sense of duty and inevitability but does not necessarily immediately derive a sense of toil or angst; but, I do recognize that part of dissymmetry in the division of household tasks belies the very notion that tasks are obligatory because, perhaps, household tasks, in general, may only be required of certain partners to perform. Overall, my purpose was to provide terms that would allow participants some openness for interpretation.

Research Design:

The collection and analysis of data was rooted in principles of grounded theory, constant comparitive method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006), and hermeneutic phenomenology. The overall ambition of this study was to understand both the meanings and meaning-making process of housework in dual-earner, newly cohabitating couples. Conducting a study with a small number of participants is not generalizable, which is one reason for my choice of utilizing interpretive approaches that aimed more towards understanding the why and how of phenomena rather than attempting to measure, predict and control (Tracy, 2013). An iterative/interpretive approach to the meaning making processes of housework is unconventional (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010) and seemed to offer new insights into different methods of studying divisions of household tasks.

Participants:

This study recruited emerging adults between the ages 18 and 24. The minimum criteria for inclusion into this study were as follows: 1) 18-24 years of age, 2) unmarried 3) newly cohabitating [<1year-2 years], 4) have no children living at home, 5) employed fulltime, and 6) have a partner who is employed full time, [full time will be defined as at least 35 hours/week of paid work outside of the home]. Below are responses to a demographic survey required of the study participants.

Meaning, Perception and Decision-Making: Examining Divisions of Housework in Newly Cohabitating Dual-Earner Couples Demographic Survey Responses												
Participant	Ashlym	Amber	Bryan	Brooklyn	Chace	Chelsea	Dominic	Dana	Ella	Everett	Frank	Fionna
Age	22	20	20	21	20	21	19	19	21	24	23	23
What gender(s) do you identify with?	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male/Cisgender	Female/ Cisgender	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female
What ethnicity(ies) do you identify as?	Hispanic	White	White	White	Hispanic	African American	Caucasian	White and Native American	Mixed	White	Hispanic	Hispanic
What is your sexual orientation?	Pansexual	Pansexual	Heterosexual	Straight/ Males	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Straight	Bisexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Straight	Straight
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Graduated From High School	Graduated from High school	High school	3 years of college	2 years of college	3 Years of College	Graduated from High School	2 years of college	2 years of college	2 years of college	Graduated From College	Graduated from College
How, or from whom, did you hear about this study?	Partner	Friend	Girlfriend	Professor	Significant Other	Professor	Friend	Friend	Friend	Significant Other	Family Member	My sister
Approximately how long have you and your partner cohabitated?	1 ½ years	Almost 2 years	2 years	2 years	14 months	1 Year and 1 Month	1 year and 8 months	1 ½ years	1 year and 4 months	1 and ½ years	6 Months	6 months
Whose residence did you choose to share?	A New Apartment and Now renting a house	A rental home	Hers	Mine	Mine	His	Mine	His home	together	We moved in to a new apartment together for the first time	Hers	Mine
How did you make this decision?	We wanted to be on our own	Communicating on what we wanted in a house	Take the next step in our relationship	It sort of just happened	Space and Convenience	Convenience and Space	I had a house and she didn't	I got kicked out when I was 18. I moved in with	Because I wanted to move from my	I wanted to move from sharing a space with two guys to moving	She moved out first and I would stay over a few	He still lived with his parents at the time and I asked

Figure 1. Participant Data

Not only are there an array of scholars notable in the utilization (and some, the origination) of grounded theory, there are even many more debates as to the processes of carrying out research that employs grounded theory. Specifically, there is no agreement about when data or theory saturation occurs and further, there is disagreement of whether or not saturation is even an appropriate measure of rigor for certain studies (Harryson et al., 2016; Perry et al., 2018). Because of time constraints and lack of a broad enough participant pool, I was only able to secure 12 participants, but this amount still proved extremely useful in developing multiple in-depth analyses.

Qualitative Research Approach

Hermeneutic phenomenology. Phenomenology has been viewed both as a philosophic tradition and as a qualitative research method. Some have considered phenomenology as more of an approach than a strict research method (Willis, 2001) and some have described it as more of a sensibility of the researcher to the "subjective experiences of groups and individuals", which, in turn, is described by the researcher using "textured" language (Kafle, 2011). Stanley Deetz (1973) argues "phenomenology was designed to produce rigorous investigations of . . .experience". Jiang and Buzzanell (2013) offers that "conflict is rooted in conflict of meaning" and that phenomenology allows one to, "focus on individuals' unique experience, emotions, and interpretations of conflict" (p. 8). Though some interpretations of hermeneutic phenomenology may seem vague and practically unapproachable, it is the aim of this study to utilize hermeneutic phenomenology as both a theoretical and methodological anchor in the most accessible ways afforded.

Grounded theory methodology. Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory has been understood as a theoretical framework, a general method and a qualitative method. For the purposes of this study, I am approaching grounded theory from the latter perspective: as a qualitative methodology (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Glasser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory to aid in bridging the gap between theory and experimental inquiry. The current study will benefit greatly from a grounded theory approach because any findings will reflect those participants' understandings of housework from their own lived-experiences and contexts; this may aid in the promotion of ecological validity (Charmaz, 2003). Additionally, grounded theory allows for novel ways of understanding housework because its aim is not to find a priori truths, but rather to interrogate how meaning is created for specific people, in specific contexts, which can yield a vast array of insight that may demonstrate divergence from prior research findings. Finally, grounded theory offers an opportunity of self-reflexivity and sincerity to the researcher, which are fundamental criteria for demonstrating exemplary research (Tracy, 2010).

Methods for Data Collection and Generation:

Though there is no specific agreed upon set of prescriptive *ways* in which hermeneutic phenomenology is conducted, van Mannen (1996, 1997) suggests such general qualitative research tools as in-depth interviews and participant observation for data collection. This study employed in-depth individual and paired-depth interviews. According to Charmaz (2000) "Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis means that the researcher's emerging analysis shapes his or her data collection procedures

(Charmaz, 2000) and this was an important aspect of the data collection process for me to be mindful of.

Each interview was audiotaped using a digital recording device. Interviews with individual partners, and, then, with the couple were conducted in a designated private space to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. I interviewed half (3) couples via digital video (Skype) and (3) in-person. To ensure consistency and as the primary researcher, I conducted all interviews. In adherence to both hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory, I employed broad, open-ended questions; though interview questions were ultimately adapted to fit the needs of the research participants. Additionally, the ordering and timing of questions varied slightly, but maintained an iterative manner as a vital component of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000).

Methods for Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Although some grounded theorists make explicit that data collection and analysis are enmeshed and often require the researcher to be involved in both simultaneously, I initially utilized "line—by-line" coding which is reading, naming and defining each line of data (Charmaz, 2000). Then, I utilized a more specific method of what Charmaz (2000) calls *focused coding*, which is beginning to form data categories or "themes" from the initial line-by-line codes. I then engaged in a method of reading, reflective writing and interpretation of interview transcripts that initially revealed eight primary themes and 27 subthemes. more specific themes. Then, I engaged in "memo-writing" which is the transitional phase from open coding to the first draft of my analysis (Charmaz, 2000). This involves taking categories that seem to be salient and examining them against

current and past literature on divisions of housework to begin building themes (Charmaz, 2000). Memo writing can be thought of in terms of an exploration of ideas, where the coding phases are more closely related to organizing and sorting the data. From here, I utilized constant comparative methods, which reduced my final theme count to six.

Summary

For this study, I utilized snowball sampling in the recruitment of 6 couples. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Half of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the other half were held via online video conferencing. I employed grounded theory and hermeneutic phenomenology in my approach to both data collection and analysis. Coding was performed using the software program NVivo. Additionally, I utilized the processes of line-by-line coding and memo-writing to analyze the data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

> [Joy often accompanies a realization of our relatedness. It is the special affect that arises out of the receptivity of caring, and it represents a major reward for the one-caring.
>
> -Nel Noddings, Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education, 1984

This study aimed to systematically examine newly cohabitating, dual-earner couples' understanding of divisions of household tasks. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews with a total of six newly cohabitating couples. Six primary themes and seventeen sub-themes emerged during data analysis of *line-by-line* and *focused coding*. These themes helped to better expose the processes of meaning-making, interpretations, and decision-making regarding divisions of housework and to determine if, and if so how, dissymmetry in household tasks are understood in order to make better sense of why divisions of housework may still be unbalanced. All themes and subthemes are listed below, in Figure 2.

Primary Themes	**Sub-themes**
I. Care	• Contingent Care • Understanding • Ownership • Manifold Symmetry
II. Consistency	• Deep Cleaning

	• Initiative • Follow Through • Time
III. Expectations	• Self • Partner • Partnership
IV. Gender & Upbringing	• "Babying" • "I'm not your mom"
V. Micro-Management	• Effectiveness • Efficiency
VI. Task Preference	• Affect Sensitivity • Task Size

Figure 2. Themes

For decades, researchers have attempted to explain why couples' division of domestic labor so often results in one partner, particularly females in heterosexual relationships, performing the lion's share of household tasks. From these efforts, several prominent theories/perspectives have emerged, including the time-availability perspective (Coverman, 1985; England & Farkas, 1986; Shelton, 1992), the bargaining perspective (Becker, 1981), the gender-display perspective (West & Zimmerman, 1987) the relative resources perspective (Mannino and Deutsch, 2007) and, more recently, the integrated

theory of the division of domestic labor (Alberts, et al., 2011). One integral claim of the integrated theory is that the ways couples communicate about and make sense of household labor performance contributes to how that labor is allocated. However, this hypothesis has not yet been explored, despite the fact that sense-making is fundamental to how individuals' make decisions and navigate everyday life.

The purpose of this study, then, was to respond to the existing gap in housework allocation research by systematically examining newly cohabitating, dual-earner couples' understanding of and communication about divisions of housework. More specifically, my aim was to expose the processes of meaning-making, interpretations, and decision-making regarding divisions of housework to determine if, and if so how, dissymmetry in household tasks is understood in order to provide additional insight into why divisions of housework may still be unbalanced. Grounded theory methodology and hermeneutic phenomenology were employed to develop a model that helps explain how couples' understanding of domestic labor operates to shape household task allocation so that a more comprehensive theory of the division of household tasks can be realized. To do this, I conducted eighteen interviews with twelve participants (six couples), ranging from ages nineteen to twenty-three. The following is a discussion of my findings.

Analysis of Findings

Six primary themes and seventeen sub-themes emerged during data analysis through *line-by-line* and *focused coding*: care, consistency, expectations, gender and upbringing, micro-management and task preference.

Care

The concept of *care* emerged as central not only to how participants articulated their own desires for such, but also in how they understood their individual and partner roles in performing household tasks. I characterize the theme "care" as a sensibility to, or respect for, a partner's needs and/or expectations in accordance with Nel Noddings' (1984) philosophy on care ethics (Blumer, 1954). This process of situating research findings in the context of other bodies of literature is central to grounded theory practice (Christiansen, 2008; Glaser, 1992, 2001, 2002; Stern & Poor, 2011). Under the larger theme of *care* emerged four sub-themes (contingent care, understanding, ownership, and manifold symmetry), which I discuss next.

Contingent Care is completing underperformed or undone household tasks for one's partner when they are unable, but not unwilling, to do so. An example of this emerged when Fionna explained she and Frank were there for one another: "thank you for doing the dishes or thank you for doing the bed. Like I was really, really exhausted this morning or I was rushed, I was rushing this morning, so I didn't get a chance to do it." On the other hand, Chelsea expressed that she would feel happiness if Chace sometimes noticed tasks being left undone because of her being busy and alluded to her frustration with Chace for not practicing this form of care:

> I think it's nice, like if you see the trash was overflowing, take it out. I think, I don't want to have to tell you to take it out. Um, just like noticing like if there are dishes and I haven't done it for a couple of days, it's not because I don't want to do them. I just am like running back and forth, doing shit all the time.

She goes on to say:

> Occasionally, occasionally, like he will make the bed or do something, but like not on a regular basis. Like I went to visit my family in Maryland, and he like cleaned up the whole room, which was nice, but like that was like a one-off thing.

Other participants echoed Chelsea's frustration with their partner's lack of performance of household tasks when they were unable to perform them.

Participants suggested that in order for a partner to provide contingent care, they must first, or at minimum, recognize the other partner's mental disposition. Noddings' (1984) puts it eloquently in stating:

> When my caring is directed to living things, I must consider their natures, ways of life, needs, and desires. And, although I can never accomplish it entirely, I try to apprehend the reality of the other. . .This is the fundamental aspect of caring from the inside (p. 14).

Moreover, a recognition of, or eye-towards, how the household actually looks is a significant feature of contingent care. That is, contingent care requires both recognizing one's partner's needs *and* connecting that need to their performance – or rather lack of performance – of household labor

We can make sense of the following statements made by one of the participants through the four features of Noddings' care. Amber recognizes that Ashlym has a hectic schedule and that it is unfair to ask too much of her because of this circumstance. Amber admits, "You can work 16 hours a day and it's not right of me to ask you to do five and six chores right after you get off work. . .when you get up at four o'clock in the morning." Through considering Ashlym's *ways of life*, Amber has made the requisite step of contingent care. Now, if Ashlym leaves her clothes in the dryer and does not fold them,

Amber has an opportunity, because she has already met the first condition of considering Ashlym's schedule, to consider that Ashlym may need rest. Amber, then, has to decide whether to perform an act of contingent care by folding the laundry for Ashlym. The closer one partner gets to *apprehending*, as Noddings puts it, the other partner's *reality*, the more likely contingent care is to transpire. I refer to this *apprehending* of *reality* as "understanding," which is another sub-theme of care.

Understanding is an awareness of events, responsibilities or health concerns that can mitigate a partner's performance of household tasks. In the following example, Dominic expresses his understanding of Dana's failure to keep promises regarding performing household tasks due to her hectic work schedule:

> So occasionally there will be times where Dana will say she'll do something, but she won't. . .it doesn't really bother me because she works a lot and she has two different jobs and she is just kind of jumping back and forth.

In another example, Everett points to communication as being an important feature in the process of understanding what partners are experiencing. During his joint interview with Ella, he reasons:

> So, we just need to have that communication and a better understanding. Maybe, like I said, you had a bad day. I don't, I didn't have a bad day, so I have no idea. I haven't really talked to you that much. I've been in my work and I come home and you're not really, you haven't told me you're in a bad mood, and you know you'd had a bad day.

Everette's point is poignant. Even if a partner makes concerted efforts to recognize one's mental disposition, they may not have access to information about one's need for care

unless explicit, verbal communication occurs. When discussing the possibility for consideration of another person's ways of life, Noddings (1984) suggests that "[we] begin, as nearly as [we] can, with the view from his eyes" (p. 15). It is reasonable that moving closer to a partner's viewpoint may require some help from that partner. In Everette's example, Ella could have moved Everett closer into her point-of-view by expressing to him that she had had a bad day. Accordingly, Everett can become more aware of why Ella is less inclined to perform certain household tasks, but first, he must be open to moving towards Ella's viewpoint for this process of understanding to arise.

Being primed toward an understanding of care require a partner to express how they feel, but it also may be that establishing an open-line of communication even before entering into cohabitation is necessary for this to occur. For example, Amber eloquently expresses the myriad constraints that can impact one's ability to perform household tasks, which can also impact a couple's ability to move toward an understanding of care:

> I feel like that's why we struggled so long is because we didn't talk about expectations from each other. Like, what if somebody works more? What if somebody has more tasks in a day? What if somebody, um, mentally isn't there? Like when you're depressed you, there's times where maybe not so much you, but I, I have, I can't get out of bed. I can't like, but I can't be in bed either. So, I'm like in this very abnormal state of I want to clean, but I can't.

Understanding is important to the overall theme of care that emerged from participant interviews. Further, enhanced understanding necessitates an involvement from both partners, as in the case of Ella and Everett. It is not the exclusive responsibility of the *one-caring* to be willing to recognize and act towards the needs of the *cared-for*, as

Noddings would call them; both the *one-caring* and the *cared-for* must act towards one another in an effort of care. The next sub-them helps us better understand this.

Ownership is feeling a sense of responsibility for one's actions and/or inactions. This responsibility is reciprocal. I, as a partner in cohabitation, am responsible for both my own actions and for how these actions may affect my partner. Noddings (1984) elucidates the sub-theme of ownership in her persuasive claim that:

> Clearly, the cared-for depends upon the one-caring. But the one-caring is also oddly dependent upon the cared-for. If the demands of the cared-for become too great or if they are delivered ungraciously, the one-caring may become resentful and, pushed hard enough, may withdraw her caring. Each of us is dependent upon the other in caring and moral relationships. The very goodness I seek, the perfection of ethical self is, thus, partly dependent on you, the other. (p. 48)

Noddings helps us understand that caring is inherently between and not necessarily towards, but as one participant explains, it is challenging to care for your partner when you feel they are not taking ownership for their actions. Amber says:

> Yeah, it's definitely been like, like mentality-wise like I'm trying to, I have a hard time, um, not sympathizing. I wouldn't use that word and I, I don't think I'm empathizing would be the word either, but I have a hard time like being like, "well you work 16 hours. . ." because at some point I was working three jobs and I was still doing a lot.

Amber goes further to say, "It's just like, it's little things that every day would take five minutes out of your time. But she's really good at managing her time at work and she talks about that a lot, but she won't bring it home." While Amber seems to be trying to

reflect on her own perceptions of what Ashlym does and does not do inside of their home, her comments illuminate the challenges of understanding and ownership of care. Brooklyn complicates the concept of ownership of household tasks as it relates to a feeling of autonomy, dependence and perhaps even power:

> I don't know if you're, you're like this, but like whenever your mom or dad would ask you to do something and then you get aggravated, you're like, uhhh but when you want to do it on your own, you're like, heck yes, I love to do that. You know what I mean? Kind of my perspective on it. You know what I mean? And not that he ever asked me to do something like along those lines, like if he wanted it done, he would do it himself. But I feel like that's kind of my. . . perspective and outlook on life. Like if I like, I dunno, I dunno how to justify that really. But that's kinda how I look at it. Like I'll do it when I'm ready; I'll do it when I see it needs to be done. Like don't ask me to do this.

Bryan expressed his sense of ownership more simply by talking about his expectations for himself, “Uh, make the bed in the morning. . .if she's out of the house before I'm out of the house. Um, just to clean up after myself [because] Brooklyn is my girlfriend, not my mom”. Everett reveals that he takes responsibility for doing the dishes sometimes as a result of recognizing that Ella has done them more times than he within a specific time-frame, “she's done them several times in a row, so [it] was definitely my turn. Just own up to it, and you have to take responsibility sometimes and just be like, yeah, "I'm going to do it. I got it next".”

Manifold symmetry is the variety of ways in which symmetry can be understood in a partnership. All three concepts - contingent care, understanding and ownership,

converge in the final sub-theme of care, which is manifold symmetry. Most participants spoke, directly or indirectly, about the need for symmetry in task performance. This sub-category seems particularly important to building a theoretically integrated model of housework so that it helps explain why partners continue to over-perform household tasks in the face of clear asymmetry. That is, fully explaining household labor allocation requires that task performance be understood as part of interacting obligations (of care, of gratitude, of fairness and of kindness) within a relationship. If domestic labor functions as an act of care, it stands to reason that care can also act as or substitute for household task performance.

Brooklyn describes how Bryan provides support in ways that are outside the parameters of household tasks but nevertheless are vitally important to her and for their partnership:

> He's like my rock. . .like if I'm having a bad day, he would be the one to bring me up. Um, like emotional support you can say, which like my father and I don't get along a lot and a lot of times that affects me and he's always the person to, you know, [to] bring me back down to earth and be like, "listen, like it's not the end of the world" and kind of calm me down. . .And he is a very positive and happy and go with the flow kind of guy. And he balances me out. . .that makes up for so much more than doing laundry or cleaning the house or putting his laundry three centimeters over to the basket, like that balances out entirely.

Here Brooklyn points out that although there may be dissymmetry in the performance of actual household tasks, that dissymmetry is mitigated by Bryan being there for her in

other ways. Similar to Brooklyn, Chelsea describes a sense of manifold symmetry with Chace:

> I think I really like to do things for Chace because I feel like he does a lot for me, and he's like a huge emotional support for me because I have gone through a lot personally in the last couple of years that someone else that wasn't invested in me would not have dealt with. So, I think in performing household tasks for him, it's kind of like me saying thank you. So, I don't really get frustrated per say with like having to do laundry or clean up or whatever. Like I get joy out of that in a way.

While Brooklyn and Chelsea describe some of their experiences in balancing household tasks with emotional support, Fionna describes her experiences with Frank in terms of his financial awareness and accountability for their household expenses. She discusses how Frank does not help with all of the household tasks, but he helps financially in other ways that Fionna considers kind:

> Currently I'm the one that's making more money. And so, I'm like, do I have a problem with it? I'm like, no, because he always tries to help me out and if he ever does have extra money, he doesn't just go off and spend it on video games or something. . .he just like willingly like, “Hey, I sent you 250, I had some extra money so you know, you can use it towards bills or you can even use it towards like stuff that you need or stuff that you want that you can't usually get because you have to pay extra for this.” And so, I'm like. . .that's sweet. I'm like, you're being considerate. Like that's how, that's how it's supposed to be.

All three of the above participants help elucidate some of the complexities surrounding how couples manage an imbalanced division of household tasks through other types of care.

As a category of care, manifold symmetry, though, is not simply as straightforward as partner X is emotionally or financially supportive while the other partner performs more household labor and, therefore, both partners perceive the partnership as symmetrical. Many participants, including the ones above, expressed challenges and frustrations with feeling they were contributing more household labor than their partners, Thus, and at times these feeling were laid bare while at others they likely were masked by an individual partner's perception of manifold symmetry. For example, Amber discussed her frustration with Ashlym, "So it's been frustrating learning to work my eight hours and do everything alone." Amber goes further in explaining that she would, of course, prefer symmetry in the performance of household tasks, but that she would be able to accept asymmetry if it was not considerable:

> She needs to give. . .a little to get a little too. . .I think it should be 50, 50, no matter what job you're working. . .I don't mind taking on that 60, 40. . .or even 70 30, but right now it's a good 80, 20 at this point.

Noddings (1984) also helps us understand the conditions that affect whether partners perceive household task performance symmetrically or asymmetrically. She maintains that a requisite of care is what she refers to as *reciprocity*. A major component of reciprocity for Noddings is an acknowledgement and response to the condition or state of the other partner. She argues that for relationships outside of parent/child, these components do not occur naturally; they need to be actively "summoned" (pp. 72-75).

For example, Ashlym (as the one-caring) must first acknowledge that Amber is frustrated by the asymmetry in performance of household tasks and, then, Ashlym must respond through acknowledgement for there to be a reciprocity of care, according to Noddings.

Moreover, Noddings says there must be a *receptiveness* to the one-caring from the cared-for in order for there to be a full realization of care (p. 22). What seems important for Noddings' ideas on *reciprocity* is that both the one-caring and the cared-for are necessary for caring. Thus, in the example of Ashlym and Amber, caring happens between them by Ashlym being open to acknowledging and responding to Amber's frustrations and Amber being *receptive* to Ashlym's response.

While Noddings provides us with a helpful way to better understand symmetry and asymmetry in the performance of household tasks through *reciprocity* and *receptiveness*, it is important to point out that, for Noddings, these processes are complex. It is not as though, in the case of Ashlym and Amber, that Ashlym simply acknowledges the imbalance and then Amber responds positively if she is receptive. As previously mentioned, for Noddings, these aspects of care do not come naturally, and she contends "Clearly, we cannot remain perpetually in the receptive mode" (p. 36). Therefore, neither Ashlym nor Amber will, necessarily, be in a state of *reciprocity* or *receptiveness*; they must both work on becoming aware of how the other is feeling and what the other is thinking. Noddings (1984) explains the nuances of the process quite eloquently:

> We, in caring, must respond: we express ourselves, we make plans, we execute. But there, are, properly, turning points. As we convert what we have received from the other into a problem, something to be solved, we move away from the other. We clean up his reality, strip it of complex and bothersome qualities, in

> order to think it. The other's reality becomes data, stuff to be analyzed, studied, interpreted. All this is to be expected and is entirely appropriate provided that we see the essential turning points and move back to the concrete and the personal.

Hence, for Noddings, it is in the *personal*, relational, dyadic, the between and the within that caring is encountered. Although I, as the one-caring, may be open to an awareness of my partner's grievances about perceived asymmetry in the division of household tasks, it does not stop at this. I must, in addition to acknowledging my partner's grievances and perhaps even responding to them, not let my partner's grievances (as a somewhat objective measure) obscure my partner. Noddings (1984) continues from the excerpt above to illuminate this further:

> Thus, we keep our objective thinking tied to a relational stake at the heart of caring. When we fail to do this, we can climb into clouds of abstractions, moving rapidly away from the caring situation into a domain of objective and impersonal problems where we are free to impose structure as we will. If I do not turn away from my abstractions, I lose the one cared-for. Indeed, I lose myself as one-caring, for I now care about the problem instead of the person (p. 36).

Caring about the "problem" and about the partner who expresses these problems may help progress our understanding of the division of household tasks. Manifold symmetry, specifically, may help housework scholars understand how partners negotiate symmetry intrapersonally. It may be that specific behaviors or actions by partners help change the interpretation of asymmetry regardless of whether those behaviors/actions are directly related to performing household tasks, which leads us to a final example from Everett. Here he articulates the need *reciprocity* in caring for his partner, Ella: "Sometimes

maybe. . . if [she] do[es] them multiple times in a row without. . . me having to do any dishes, then maybe I can. . .get her maybe flowers. . .just buy her something nice.".

Care along with the subthemes contingent care, understanding, ownership and manifold symmetry help explain/expose some of the processes of meaning making that participants reported either implicitly and/or explicitly. Another major theme that helped to explain/expose participant's meaning making processes is *consistency*.

Consistency

Consistency emerged as important to how participants made sense of why household tasks were either adequately performed or underperformed. "Consistency" describes predictable behaviors that are performed in a similar way over time. Under the larger theme of *consistency* emerged four sub-themes (deep cleaning, initiative, follow through and time).

Deep cleaning is an intensive form of housework performance that allows routine tasks to be performed more easily to maintain cleanliness. Couples discussed this concept frequently during their interviews, as it related to both their desire to maintain a clean household and the challenges they faced when deep cleaning was either not performed at all, or when deep cleaning was performed but maintenance was not. During an interview, Ella admitted "But. . .I don't keep things clean, so I deep clean, and then he keeps it clean, maintains it by picking everything up." There was a difference, however, in how Ella and Everett understood their respective performances of household tasks, as they related to deep cleaning and maintenance. Everett expressed his frustration with Ella deep cleaning but not helping to maintain the cleaning afterwards:

> Well, it comes back to the pick up after yourself, like. . .you can. . .deep clean, but if you can't maintain that cleanliness, you can't keep it clean for more than a week, then there's really no point in even performing that deep cleaning. . . It's just, I don't know, it's kind of working backwards in a sense.

However, Ella revealed that she felt she was keeping up her end of the agreement by spending a lot of time and effort to deep clean and that Everett was supposed to be the partner maintaining it. She understood the agreement as acceptable and believed the arrangement had been working:

> I take days to just deep clean everything. . .At the beginning I did just have stuff everywhere and was not organized. And then we negotiated and came up with a good plan that I was home more. I had more days off, so I would do like deep cleaning and then he, he's kind of better at just keeping it, keeping up with it, keeping it clean. And that has worked well.

These excerpts reveal a disjuncture in Ella and Everett's efforts to create shared meaning about household tasks, deep cleaning, and the maintenance of order and cleanliness.

Fionna and Frank also described their engagement with deep cleaning. Fionna stated that although Frank would help her with deep cleaning on the weekends, she wanted him also to try to start it without her having to ask him. She said, "It's always like me initiating it. Like, this place is messy, it's filthy. We need to clean. And so, it'd be nice for him to initiate it and be like, hey, we need to clean". Frank acknowledged that his standards and understanding of deep cleaning were different from Fionna's:

> Just kind of did the deep cleaning of the bathroom and, you know, my deep cleaning was little scrub of the toilet bowl, you know, that's it. She's like, "no,

> you've got to clean around on the floor around it. . . like I said, she likes to deep clean, so I tend to take the easier stuff that can get knocked out fairly quickly. It doesn't need much deep cleaning and she'll take the things like that are a little deeper.

Both couples experienced difficulty in making meaning of their partners' performance of deep cleaning and, therefore, it challenged them to find a way to explain or to accept their different performances of cleaning.

Deep cleaning versus "picking up" is an important feature of couples' negotiation of the division of household tasks, yet it is not one that has been addressed in existing literature on the topic. The performance of deep cleaning was important to couples' understanding of what, specifically, constituted cleaning. Whether it was underperformed, or not performed at all, it could adversely impact partner interactions. Another feature that affected partner interactions was an expectation of *initiative*.

Initiative is taking action to perform household tasks without a partner's request or reminder. This concept was important in how couples discussed not only the ways they negotiated the division of household tasks but also the ways in which they created and co-created meaning about conflict arising from a perceived lack of initiative. Additionally, the concept of initiative seemed to highlight the fact that most partners did not want to consistently have to tell the other partner what to do or how to do it. Dana said she wanted Dominic to be ". . .able to do things without me asking him multiple times is one thing that I expect of him and that's [something] we're working on". Chace admits his lack of initiative in performing even menial household tasks, but affirms it is his "care" for Chelsea that inspires him to follow her requests:

> Yeah. Uh, cause I value Chelsea and I don't want to lose Chelsea so if she's like if she was like, "Hey, do this, like", um, I do it. Um, so I said like trash. It's like a duty that I have, but it's never something that I do autonomously. It's something of like, "Hey", like [a] 13-year-old boy, like "take out the trash because you can't do it yourself". Um, and the same thing of like with any other tasks, like "do the dishes". She'll never ask me to clean the toilet because she doesn't think I can clean the toilet.

Chelsea confirmed Chace's lack of initiative but also expressed her tendency to be untroubled by having to remind Chace to perform household tasks:

> If I ask him to do it, he'll do it, and he won't complain about it. So that's nice. I have to ask more than once or several times sometimes, but the fact that he'll do it and not complain is makes it like, it doesn't really bother me as much. . .what I've just started doing is putting it in front of the door, so he can't get out. He can just go take it out. Um, yeah, I guess I'm a little passive aggressive in that way.

In another part of the interview, however, Chelsea explicitly expressed frustration with consistently having to tell Chace to take the trash out. Similarly, Amber alluded to her frustration with Ashlym not taking initiative in performing seemingly straightforward tasks:

> So, I expect like there's dishes in the sink, she should do them. If there's, you know, the dog's chewed up something, you clean it up, you, if there's dust all over things wipe it down. It's just like, it's little things that every day would take five minutes out of your time. But she's really good at managing her time at work and she talks about that a lot, but she won't bring it home.

During their couple interview, Dana explicitly told Dominic that “I want you to do things without me asking you”, and Dominic rebutted, “I would like. . .when you say that you're going to do something to actually follow through”. These excerpts demonstrate the importance of initiative in the performance of household tasks but that participants tolerated their partner’s lack it as long as upon request the non-initiating partner performed the task(s). Nonetheless, at other times, participants frustration with having to remind their partners. Thus, participants wavered about whether they felt frustration or not with their partner’s lack of initiative.

Some participants avoided the problem of reminding their partners by simply performing the work themselves. They suggested that it was more work for them to continually request initiative from their partner or to remind their partner to perform a task than it was to simply perform the task themselves. Chelsea explained why partners might do so:

> Um, I do clean up the desk. It's not that I don't want to ask him to do it, but it's just faster for me to do it myself than to ask him to come and clean up all this stuff. Um, in my mind it's faster and most of the time when I look at it, I am in the midst of doing something else. So, it was just like, okay, let me just put this in a pile and then go back to what I'm doing.

Chelsea’s comments highlight the possible consequences of performing household tasks that are a partner’s responsibility in order to conserve energy. Because Chelsea repeatedly cleans Chace’s mess from the desk, Chace may be unmotivated to initiative doing so because he has learned that Chelsea will perform the task if avoids it. Thus, lack of initiative can operate either to increase symmetry (one partner askes and the other

agrees to perform the task) or to decrease it (one partner does not ask so the other partner does not perform the task). Yet another way that dissymmetry can occur mirrors the other side of a lack of initiative – the lack of *follow through*.

Follow through is the desire for the routine completion of household tasks after one says they will complete them and/or after they are begun. Couples discussed this concept as a complement to the previous theme, initiative. These two concepts are inextricably linked because, for couples, having initiative was important to starting the task but follow through was just as important, because once started if the task was not followed through, frustration arose. In such cases, frustration was delayed, not denied. For example, Dominic expressed the tension he experienced in his own lack of follow through while also being frustrated with Dana engaging in a lack of follow through:

> So occasionally there will be times where Dana will say she'll do something, but she won't. . .It doesn't really bother me because she works a lot and she has two different jobs and she is just kind of jumping back and forth. But then again, it does bother me because if she has a couple of days off in a row, which she, I mean she hasn't had in a while, but back when she used to, she would be like, okay, "well I'll, I'll clean" or "I'll do this" and she doesn't. And it just kind of, I mean I'm, I'm victim too, so like I'm, I'm not being like a hypocrite or anything and saying like, oh, like, oh, she needs to start getting her stuff together. No, I mean, I, I'm a victim of it too, so like, uh, I can't get mad, but I also can't not get mad at the same time.

Ashlym also discussed how she and Amber find it challenging to get motivated to perform household tasks, but she ascribes character traits that serve as a veneer for their occasional lack of follow through:

> So, we are big. . .on manners and so to me that's like rude that I'm not cleaning, but like at the same time, like battling with my lazy tired self. Like "dude, like get up, like help her do something". So yeah, I feel like I should because it. . .should be equal and it shouldn't be just one person. I. . . .do feel bad, but like I said, it's constantly battling with myself. Okay. I Dunno. I Dunno. It's, we have chronic laziness, like swear. I really like, we're lazy but we're really nice and have manners.

Thus, Ashlym makes sense of Amber's and her failure to do housework by juxtaposing the trait of laziness with the attribute of being nice and having manners. Laziness generally is understood negatively or, at least, as a tendency that one works against, while being nice and having manners are generally traits we aspire towards. Her juxtaposition can be seen as a type of *symbolic veiling* that demotivates couples from following through on performing household tasks. Softening the symbolism of laziness with the oft admired idea of amiability can serve to justify underperformance or nonperformance of household tasks - and possibly erode the very consistency that couples reported preferring. Deep cleaning, initiative, and follow-through are all closely linked to the concept of *time*.

Time refers to the perceived impact that a lack of it has on one's ability to regularly perform household tasks. For example, Chelsea explains how her cleaning routine used to be quite consistent until her schedule was altered:

> [I'd] get up at 7:30, do my laundry weekly. Um, I would have like a cleaning day on Sunday too. Like [I'd] clean every week, clean the bathroom every week, like clean up the room, vacuum, like all this different stuff. . .it's hard to do now because my schedule [is] kind of all over the place and. . . I guess I haven't like adjusted my schedule to accommodate to the fact that. . .my schedule is just different. We are busy, but then two, we live together. So, the dynamic is just different about like when I can do things, maybe I just want to sleep and lay in with Chace and not get up.

Chace expressed his understanding of time more as it related to his own perception of priorities:

> It's weird cause like I can sit down and write like a 20-page paper over the course of like 12 hours. Like constantly, but like small things like that [chores] I think are a waste of time for me to do. And that's not to say. . .I think that I'm better than her and that it's something that is more fitting for her to do. It's just like the way my brain rationalizes it. If I'm comfortable and I eat. . .I put the food on our nightstand and then I turn over and get comfortable again because leisure time is nice. . .I haven't really reflected on, but now I'm thinking about it like most of the time. . .it's her cleaning dishes.

While Chelsea recognized that her new schedule had impeded her cleaning routine, she also, as did Chace, expressed the need for leisure.

Although the time availability perspective is well documented in the housework literature and has been somewhat supported (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000), it has also been challenged because of its lack of attention to the dynamics found in

contemporary families. That is, it does not account for the increased occurrence of multitasking, outsourcing household tasks, volunteer work, inflexibility/flexibility of schedules (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018), and how leisure time is actually spent. As we see with Chelsea and Chace, their inflexible work/school schedules combined with their need to perform multiple tasks (in and outside of the home) complicates how one might otherwise understand their distribution of household tasks based strictly on how much time they have available for any given task.

The availability of and use of "free time" as it relates to household labors is complicated by what Hochschild's (1989) describes as the *leisure gap.* She contends men not only have more leisure time (i.e., time spent on unpaid tasks) but that they utilize this time on tasks they prefer, while women have less leisure time and much of the leisure time they do have is spent on household tasks. (p. 4). Though some housework scholars have shown a *stall* or closing of the *leisure gap* (Bianchi et al., 2000; Gershuny, Sullivan, & Robinson, 2014) since the publication of Hochschild's original book, couples in this study reported that time available for leisure and relaxation became problematic when a partner perceived the other had more of this time but did not use it to help with household tasks.

The effect of time on leisure is a source of frustration and conflict for couples negotiating domestic labor activity. When time is limited, partners may have different preferences regarding whether housework or leisure should be sacrificed. Amber addressed this issue in her comments:

> I may not work as much, or I may not do as much as you do at your job. But I'm still running around doing things all the time and I've got school coming up for

> myself and I can't handle school, a full-time job that I'm about to start or starting Monday all four dogs, my complications with my family and then like doing her part. And so, and I tried to tell her like, I cannot juggle all these, I can't for my mental health. . . But when she does have her days off is when I get super frustrated because I'm like, yeah, that's your day to relax. But if you take one hour in your day out of your 24 hours in the day like it would help me. I like, and that's where I feel I feel alone basically in that.

Thus, leisure time is important to understanding how individuals and couples understand the processes used to divide housework between dual-earner couples. Leisure time is significant not simply for its availability; the quality of the leisure time is equally as important as amount. Therefore, although Chelsea or Amber may have a specific amount of perceived leisure time by their partners, if they are not spending this time on what qualitatively may be understood as "leisurely" activities, the assumption of leisure may be challenged. This is an important distinction because partners may not consider the time spent on household tasks in their estimation of time availability, which could result in them grossly overestimating either their own amount of leisure time and/or their partners.

Expectations

The concept of expectations emerged as an important theme that informs couples' beliefs about divisions of household tasks as well as their thoughts on equity, responsibility and consideration. *Expectations* reflect partners' beliefs that something will or should happen in regard to their own and their partner's performance of household

tasks. Three sub-themes emerged under the larger theme of expectations: *self, partner* and *partnership*.

Though the following sub-themes are divided into *self, partner* and *partnership*, it is important to note that expectations are motivated by myriad unconscious and conscious mental processes, and they are often connected with not only how we view ourselves, but how we think others view us. Therefore, although *self* and *other* are described as separate sub-themes, they are inextricably linked, especially in the process of dyadic decision-making.

Self refers to beliefs regarding specific tasks one should or should not perform and how these tasks should be performed. For example, when asked what his expectations were as a cohabitating partner Bryan mentioned directly, "Uh, make the bed in the morning if (I) know. . .she's out of the house before I'm out of the house. Um, just to clean up after myself. Brooklyn is my girlfriend, not my mom." Interestingly, Brooklyn, his partner, mentioned that she sees herself as a kind of "housewife". She said:

> I . . . think. . . myself standard is to just almost. . .be like the typical housewife, I guess you could say, but not staying at home and not working. I love to cook. I love the clean. I don't mind taking care of him and obviously he's not going to just like let me hang loose.

These responses reflect what Sillars and Kalbflesh (1989) call "silent arrangements," "which are decisions reached without verbal agreement" (p. 182). These *silent arrangements* are based on the reenactment of social roles that individuals acquire from reference groups, or they "may reflect cultural norms besides sex roles or expectations that partners share because of similar beliefs, backgrounds and experiences" (p. 182).

Brooklyn and Bryan have expectations of themselves and each other based on their *silent arrangements* regarding household tasks, perhaps based on both reference groups and similar backgrounds and experiences. When discussing roles, Brooklyn mentioned, ". . . the yard work and stuff . . . (I'm) kind of like, that's all you. Um, and then like the cooking and cleaning. I don't know if I'd really want him to make my dinner unless he's grilling". Here Brooklyn articulates her expectations for own performance of household labor based on the role she assumes as "housewife." Her expectations likely contribute to the couples' enactment of their silent arrangements for divisions of household tasks; they also reflect how she makes meaning of her own performance, by labeling her activities with the familiar term "housewife.".

Further, when asked, "Did you and your partner discuss your expectations for allocating household tasks before you moved in together, Brooklyn responded with a definitive, "No." It is probable, then, that Brooklyn and Bryan's lack of communication on the topic strongly affected the creation and enactment of their *silent arrangements*. As Sillars and Kalbflesch (1989) explain:

> If two people have the same expectations entering the relationship, then silent arrangements may be completely unconscious, that is, it never dawns upon the couple that they might do things differently. In effect, the decision is in place when the relationship is formed. (p. 183)

Brooklyn's expectation that she performs the role of housewife - which she indicated includes cooking and cleaning - likely informs her decision to actually perform traditionally female household tasks before she and Bryan even moved in together. While Sillars and Kalbflesch contend that *silent arrangements* play a key role in couples'

decision making-processes, they also argue that they need not be permanent. They argue that *silent arrangements* can evolve into explicit agreements through direct communication stimulated by unarticulated relationship rules being violated (even though silent arrangements are often unarticulated, they are often still expected; hence, they become rules that can be broken) and individual expectations changing (p. 183). This violation of relationship rules and changing of self-expectations is illustrated below in Brooklyn comments about her frustration with Bryan underperforming particular household tasks:

> He doesn't put his laundry in the laundry basket or like if he gets undressed, he just sets his clothes right there or he leaves his socks in the bottom of the bed. Like, okay, I'll wear them to bed and they'll end up in the bottom of the bed so then when I do laundry. I'm like, why the heck are there seven socks in the laundry? Um, he leaves crap everywhere. So, like as you could like tell where he's at because he makes the trail. I'm laughing now but I usually get really angry. . . Like the laundry basket will be three centimeters from where he drops his clothes.

Thus, although Brooklyn mentioned enjoying taking care of Bryan and taking on the role of a "housewife", she also mentioned her frustrations with him not performing particular household tasks and/or underperforming them - illustrating Sillars' and Kalbflesch's contention that implicit decision-making processes can evolve into explicit ones. While expectations for how one should or should not perform household, tasks were quite relevant to the current study and in moving toward a theoretically integrated model of housework, expectations of how partners should perform household tasks was equally relevant.

Partner refers to the respondent's expectations regarding what tasks the partner should or should not perform and how those tasks should be performed. For example, Fionna discussed one household task she expected Frank to perform: "My only expectation is that like, well he does his own laundry, so he's really good about that. . .he [also] does the dishes a lot more than I do. So, I'll, I will commend him on that." On the other hand, Frank expressed his frustration about Fionna expecting him to do the dishes all of the time:

> Like I said earlier, I mean it makes sense. Um, she does most of the cleaning or most of the cooking actually. So, I end up doing the dishes pretty much almost all the time. And it bugs me sometimes cause you know, she'll just kinda, you know, expect me to do it sometimes and I'm just like, you know, you could try it out, you know, sometimes, you know, there's not as much cooking [to do], so you can kind of help me out a little bit.

Frank describes a form of *implicit* decision making that occurred because he started cleaning dishes when he initially moved in with Fionna. Now he is relegated to that task without their ever talking about it (Sillars & Kelbflesch, 1989). Put differently, cleaning the dishes may have become, what Watzlawick (1976) called a "precedent-setting act" for Frank that prompted Fionna to, even if implicitly, expect him to perform that duty from that moment forward. Thus, dishwashing may have become "his" task, in her mind at least, without her ever having to verbally communicate that she expected mostly him to clean the dishes.

Explicit, verbal communication is important to defining what one partner expects from the other, and this seemed most apparent when a failure to communicate directly

occurred, as was the case with Everett and Ella. Everett articulated the complexity of implicit expectations:

> I mean, then sometimes one person feels like they're. . .contributing more and that's what happens when you get expectations, or when you don't talk about certain things. You know, you're expecting me to do the dishes next and then you. . .do them again and you're expecting me to do them. . .the next time. And I don't do it again. Then you know, we didn't talk about anything. I'm not, I'm not expecting to do them, but you're expecting me to do them. Maybe I'm not thinking that way. Maybe I'm not thinking that I need to do the dishes next. Then you're mad that I'm not thinking about, you know how you're feeling because you're, you're feeling like you're doing the dishes every time, but I feel like I'm maybe doing other things and so we just don't want to oversee those.

He went on to explain:

> I would say the most important thing would be to not create a bunch of expectations in your head. So just because you did something doesn't mean that they're going to do it next time. Or just because you cook doesn't mean. . .you just. . .expect them to clean. I guess it's those expectations that can cause you to have issues if you don't talk about it. You know, if you don't talk about, "hey, I cleaned, can you" or "I cooked, can you clean?" Sometimes you just expect them to, and then those expectations when they don't get met, they cause issues.

Similarly, Dana discussed the importance of direct communication:

> Making sure there's communication. Like you can't just assume that one day the other person's going to do it and you shouldn't have to ask them to do it, but like

> you can't assume. You gotta be able to talk to and be like, "Hey, I have today off from work. I'm going to work on getting the house done and stuff".

With both couples, assumptions about responsibility for dishwashing were conveyed implicitly. These messages, although unstated, seemed clear. To Frank, because Fionna generally did not do dishes, it was clear that Fionna expected him to perform that task while Everett thought because Ella repeatedly did the dishes, she did not expect his help. This is role of communication an important feature of Sillars and Kalbflesch's (1989) distinction between implicit arrangements and explicit agreements; "silent arrangements are not inherently obscure" but, "in fact . . . [they] are sometimes as well understood as explicit agreements" (p. 184). However, frustration, disappointment, indifference, and even conflict may arise in such cases if the person who is implicitly "contracted" to do the task is not satisfied with the arrangement.

Partnership. Just as couples reported their expectations for themselves and one another, they also possessed expectations of the partnership as a whole. Thus, partnership refers to a participant's view of the expectations the couple has for themselves as a unit. A primary expectation for most couples was that household labor was to be shared – either equally or equitably. For example, Amber discussed how she made an agreement with Ashlym that the performance of household tasks would be equal:

> But ever since we. . .moved into our new place, we've decided because. . .it's different being in an apartment with big stuff and being easily crowded, which is why I was so overwhelmed. Um, and now we're in a house and I told her, I was like, "This is a decision we're making together. Like you are going to go 50-50 on this. Like there's no going back on that".

Dominic also stated a preference for equality:

> So, I believe everything should be split half and half. Uh, there are times where Dana will do most and there are times where I will do most, uh, it just all depends on what we talk about and the things that we set up for ourselves.

Speaking about his expectations for Ella and himself, Everett was not as definitive about the division of household tasks being 50-50. He allowed for subtleties that perhaps more accurately represent couple's expectations:

> I don't want to say like it needs to be 50-50, but I'm saying you don't want to make the other person to feel like you're not contributing, you know, like they're doing all the efforts. So, you definitely want to have that middle ground of not, I'm definitely going to be able to do this, this and this. If you're doing the dishes, you know, I'm not going to expect you to do everything every single time.

Similarly, Brooklyn spoke briefly about hers and Bryan's arrangement to work towards their version of an equitable division of household tasks, "[Bryan] pick[s] it up and buy[s] it, and then I cook it and clean it. So, I guess it kind of counts for all fairness". Amber took a straightforward approach in explaining, "I'm a very like, common sense person, so if something's dirty, whether I'm home, she's home, it should be picked up and we have four dogs too, so there's always something to be done".

Fionna's version of equity offered a similar "give and take" type of arrangement; she framed it through a brief account of her coming back from a vacation in Las Vegas where she came down with a cold:

> And so, I got sick and so that week, like I hadn't really been cooking or cleaning because I was just like, I'm so tired, I'm so sick. I just need to lay on the couch

> and just eat some soup or whatever. So, he definitely had to pick up a lot of the slack. He had to, you know, find his dinner. He had to clean the dishes or whatever, so I can see why he was like, I'm done. And I'm like, okay. But that's, that's how it is sometimes. Like you have to give that extra and pick up that extra slack for the other person when they're sick or when they're feeling tired. And I'm like, if it was the other way around, I would be catering to you. I would've been like, "oh, well you're sick. Let me, you know, here drink some soup right now".

Overall, couples' partnership expectations ranged from a straightforward discussion about dividing household labor equally, or 50-50, to more nuanced accounts of equitable arrangements and how misunderstandings occur in both situations due to implicit decisions made from the onset of the partnership.

Gender and Upbringing

The influence of *gender and upbringing* was another significant theme that emerged from the data. Two sub-themes that emerged from analysis of the data, which were "Nvivo" or the actual words used by participants: *babying* and *I'm not your mom*. Because these themes/phrases emerged in this manner, they are not separated from the larger theme of gender and upbringing. Gender, as a social construct, is deeply embedded in not only how we see ourselves in relationship to others but also how we embody and enact identities (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Because of the ubiquitous and intricate quality of gender as an ideologically social construct, many researchers argue housework scholars need to think more critically about how the gender ideology perspective is employed in research (Coltrane, 2000; Geist and Ruppanner, 2018; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010).

Consistent with Geist and Ruppaanner's (2018) views that "gender is not enacted or displayed within couples in easily measured or consistent ways" (p. 254), couples' performance of housework did not always match the common associations that a given household task has with gender. For example, some researchers have described routine household tasks such as cleaning and cooking as "female-dominated" (Presser, 1994) whereas other tasks such as maintaining the lawn and taking out the trash are described as being "masculine" (Blair & Lichter; Shelton, 1992). However, couples' reports reveal that stereotypical gender expectations for task performance did not align perfectly with participants' behavior. Some stereotypical *female-dominated* tasks were performed by men. However, only one woman reported performing a more "masculine" task - yardwork, specifically gardening.

Herein, I describe *gender* as participant's beliefs about how socially constructed roles, behaviors, and activities influenced their own and their partner's performance of household tasks. Participants' comments indicated that they understood divisions of housework from a gendered framework that originally stemmed from their childhood and later was reinforced through societal conventions and peer groups. Lipsitz-Bem (1981) explained the connection between childhood experience and adult expectations and behavior in her gender schema theory where she defines a schema as:

> . . . a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organizes and guides an individual's perception. A schema functions as an anticipatory structure, a readiness to search for and to assimilate incoming information in schema-relevant terms. Schematic processing is thus highly selective and enables the individual to impose structure and meaning onto the vast array of incoming stimuli. (p. 355)

She goes further to describe the connection among schema, society and gender:

> Society thus teaches the developing child two things about gender. First. . .it teaches the substantive network of sex-related associations that can come to serve as a cognitive schema. Second, it teaches that the dichotomy between male and female has extensive and intensive relevance to virtually every aspect of life. (p. 362)

These cognitive schemas and an enforced dichotomy between male and female serve to influence how couples understood the domain of housework. For example, Amber and Ashlym had a lot to say about their upbringing and how it influenced their current outlook on housework. Amber briefly described housework during her childhood, "I've had to do all the chores in my family, like ever, ever. My brother had one chore in high school and that was to take out the trash, and he was always gone." Ashlym shared Amber's sentiment regarding the imbalance in housework between her and her brother growing up:

> From eight, nine years old. . .I learned how to clean the house, the whole house. . . I knew how to do everything. . .that's what I was taught. So, uh. . .[that's] the way I was. . .that's not fair because I'm cleaning this whole house and this boy. . .don't listen to nothing. . .all he does is take out the trash.

Ashlym went further to describe:

> So . . . .towards the end of me living with my parents, I was so pissed off all the time cause I'm like, yeah, I would [have] to clean. . .my room was probably the only thing I didn't clean, but I did clean everything else. I always swept and

> mopped the floors. I always did the kitchen, always cleaned up his nasty fucking pee on the toilet every day like that . . . kind of stuff makes me mad.

Ashlym went on to talk about her current interactions and thoughts about her brother:

> My brother doesn't do shit, and he doesn't care. He doesn't care [about] nothin', and he disrespects my mom because my parents are now divorced. . .So every time I go to my mom's house now I make my brother clean something.

Both Amber and Ashlym's brothers came up often in discussions about their childhood experiences with housework. Additionally, Amber reported a kind of *sex typing*, as Lipsitz-Bem called it (1981), during her adolescent years whereby she would take on the attributions and behaviors of her grandmother. Amber said she was used to her grandmother ". . .just being very old school" and that:

> . . .women are to be seen and not heard. I was supposed to be in the kitchen, and I was supposed to be cleaning. I couldn't go out. Like my grandma taught me how to clean . . . [she] used to have me scrub. . .like white glove test.

During the couple interview, Amber also discussed her grandfather's current level of household performance, "My Grandpa, he's eight, almost eighty years old. If not, he is 80 years old. He doesn't know how to make a sandwich. He puts meat on a piece of bread." Immediately after Amber mentioned her grandfather barely being able to make a sandwich, Ashlym commented, "He. . .would like basically to command her grandma. . .like "I'm hungry, make me food".

When discussing her parents, Amber revealed the reason she adheres more closely to her grandmother's way of performing housework as opposed to her parents:

> Like my mom and my dad, they're not dead. They're just drug addicts. They're really gross people too. Like they're like. . .my mom's chilled out a lot, but like they would just let clothes pile up and ever since I was little, I've just always been real gross around that type of stuff.

Amber also begins to assess why Ashlym possibly is the way she is, in terms of Ashlym's both underperformance and sometimes nonperformance of household tasks. She says of Ashlym:

> her mom also gave her some of the, the, I wouldn't say issues, the problems that she's facing nowadays because her mom's not always, like when she's on her drive to clean, she'll spring clean the whole room, but when she's not, the house can get gross.

In short, Amber describes Ashlym's gender schema as being affected by her grandmother's over-performance of housework and also as being heavily influenced by her mother, father and brother's underperformance. Although, as Lipsitz-Bem (1981) contends, gender schema are cognitive processes, they are also socially derived and therefore likely to be shared between members of a couple, as was the case with Amber and Ashlym.

In their joint interview, Amber explained her schema for cleaning based on her childhood experiences; she also communicated and attempted to enforce this schema with her partner. Amber said, "I basically like I'll nag on her, but it's not, in a mean way like her mom, like her mom would do the same thing. Like her mom would tell her, "Ashlym, go do that. Ashlym, go do that." Although, Ashlym's own schema (not performing household tasks and/or underperforming) was at odds with Amber's requests, their

interaction influenced Ashlym to perceive that household tasks should be performed differently.

The connections between childhood experiences and adult experiences in specific relationships both cover up and reveal something important about the complexity of upbringing and gender. Although we are influenced by preexisting gender schemas, we are also influenced by people in our lives in the present, and through our interactions with them, we create meaning and patterns of behavior that both reflect and shape those meanings. Below is an example of how one partner's beliefs about domestic labor altered through interactions with his partner.

Dominic described his upbringing:

> I understand now what my mother meant by, "hey if your friends, make the mess, clean it up because it's like, it's your bedroom". Uh, "if you can't control like your friends picking up after themselves, then you have to". So, like I get it. And that was a big part of me growing up. Just like making sure that if somebody came over and they left, let's just say, a soda can in my room, I'd pick it up and I throw it away just because like it was kind of, it was taught to me at a younger age . . . But other than that, like I didn't have any chores. I didn't do anything.

In response to a follow-up question asking, "So you were just in your mom's house responsible for cleaning your own room, but not anything outside of your room?" he responded, "Yeah, no . . . I didn't take out any trash, I didn't do dishes. I didn't do anything until I was 14 or 15".

Dana, his partner, described her upbringing as follows:

> As the oldest I, you know, had to tend to pick up a little bit more of the help around the house, you know, help take care of the littler kids, help with the chores and ya know, my parents wanted to make sure we knew like how to be responsible, how to like take care of ourselves when we did grow up. So, they made sure we knew how to do the laundry room. They made sure we knew how to do dishes and sweep and cook and stuff like that. . . I've been doing chores since I was a small child, so it's just easy for me.

Dana was then asked: "What was the combination of genders with your siblings?" She responded, "four girls and two boys" and went further to discuss how her parents worked with her and all of her siblings in the performance of household tasks:

> They had a really good system where they would kind of like write out all of the chores that would be done for the week, and how often needs to be done. And then we were all, we all rotated. So, one week you would do this task and then the next week you would do at different task. And that way one person wasn't always cooking, and one person wasn't always vacuuming. It was kind of all shared.

Now, while their upbringing, in terms of responsibility for performance of household tasks, was different, Dana and Dominic reported they were moving closer toward her understanding of how household tasks should be divided. In fact, during the couple interview Dana suggested:

> I think honestly, we need to actually sit down and write out a like a chore list and figure out who has time to do what, when and make sure that it gets done and if, if we need to, we can make it an incentive. If we do everything that we needed to do for like three weeks, we can go on a dinner date or something like that. Just to get

> us into a routine because I think that's what we're missing. We're missing a routine and it's really sabotaging the house.

Dominic immediately agreed and said, “Well we have four days. Four days and my new schedule releases. . .We can plan everything out to the T”.

When asked, “On a scale from one to five, five being very satisfied and zero being very dissatisfied, please rate your overall satisfaction with you and your partner's house work arrangement” Dana and Dominic said “3 and “4-4 ½” respectively. Dana seemed to have the most complaints about Dominic’s lack of follow-through, but she did not report that he failed to attend to any household tasks. Thus, although he was raised with a particular way of understanding and ascribing meaning to the performance of household tasks, his understanding, or sense making, changed when he began cohabitating with Dana.

Frank and Fionna had very different experiences with performing household labor based on their genders and cultures, and their family practiced affected how their negotiations around task allocation unfolded. Frank described his childhood household labor thusly:

> I was taught how to clean and do all that since I was young. . .but typically the females of the household were expected to do all the cleaning. . .but. . .my mom still taught me specifically for that reason that a lot of women are not going to want to be taking care of [or] babying some guy in the future. And . . .now that I'm living with my girlfriend and I appreciate her for doing that even though I hated cleaning back in the day. . .I mean, yeah, I can thank her for that.

Fionna, on the other hand explains:

> Well me growing up I was in charge of, it was just me and my mom always cleaning and because like I helped her out all the time and she was used to it, it was really hard for her to train the other ones because she was like already used to having me. So, it was me and her and maybe my other sister, my second oldest sister. And we did all, most all of the housework. And since all of the three younger ones are way closer in age, they just kind of got babied a lot. Even to this day, like they're calling and they're in high school already. Um. . .they're seniors and juniors. . .and they're calling in, they're like, "Hey, I'm hungry". "What? Make yourself some soup. Make yourself a sandwich. Like what do you mean you're hungry?"

Although Frank learned to clean and performed some tasks in his family home, Fionna, along with her mother, was responsible for the majority of the tasks in their household. Perhaps because of those duties, she perceived Fran's mother babied him. She said,

> His family is a Middle Eastern. . .she has four boys. . .[she] takes care of them like no other, oh, "do you need a glass of water while you are sitting at the dinner table and three feet away, let me grab it for you" and when I'm sitting there at dinner, I'm like, "go get your own damn glass of water", you don't need your mom to get him. Oh "you need me to put your dishes away?" "Oh, you need me to clean your sheets?" I mean like, she'll do it. Like she. . .that's their culture. You know what I mean? Like that's how they were raised to just take care of the people like their kids and their husband. Like that's how they were raised. And I

kind of was raised the same way to just. . .I guess take care of your significant other and the children and be like supermom I guess you could say as well.

Fionna's comments reflect her ambivalence regarding gendered performances of household labor. She uses a somewhat negative term, "babied," to describe Frank's mother's behavior, but then she acknowledges that she also was reared to be someone who would be a "housewife" and "supermom." Below, she takes an opposing position this, suggesting she does not want to follow the same gender norms she experienced (and that Frank's mom embodies). She said

[It's] like his mom and his tia pretty much do everything for him. So, I'm like, he has no responsibility. How is he, how is that going to work with us? Is he going to start expecting me to do all that stuff and pick up the like his stuff? And I'm like, "no". I'm like, "I'm not your mom". "I'm not going to be picking up after you". "You pick up your shoes now".

In these excerpts Fionna attempts to makes sense of competing narratives, "being a housewife" versus "not being a mom." Frank and Fionna's division of household tasks reflects their attempt to make sense not only of her uncertainty about this issue but of Frank's as well. He explained that he was thankful that his mother taught him to clean, but he also said he resented having to "own" the task of dishwashing.

All three couples - Amber and Ashlym, Dana and Dominic and Fionna and Frank - recognized the connection between their upbringing, gendered traditions, and their attitudes toward and performance of domestic labor. The couples also struggled with deciding to what degree they could resist their gendered socialization and how they could create fair task allocation. Thus, as participants from this study seem demonstrate,

gendered meanings ascribed to divisions of household tasks are constructed and reconstructed, created and re-created, and they can be difficult to change.

Micro Management

Micro-management emerged as another important way that couples made sense of their divisions of household tasks. Similar to the links discussed this far the theme micro-management links to other themes located in the data. *Micro-management* refers to a participant's expectations for or evaluations of the other partner's household task performance based on his/her own criteria of effectiveness and efficiency.

Effectiveness is an assessment of whether the quality of a completed task is deemed acceptable. Several participants discussed their inability to meet the household task standards of their partners while others commented on their partner's failure to meet their standards. Chace describes his experience with the former:

> I think it's just like there's an expectation to have things done, um, by both of us. So, for her, she's all about like, um, taking care of the house and I've tried to help her with that. What I do, like, isn't right in her mind, um, which. . . very . . . well . . . may not be.

During the couple interview, Chace provided an example of his and Chelsea's differences regarding what counts as an "effective performance" of toilet cleaning:

> I'm very good at that. And like there were six boys in the house (his family home) at the time. Like I was cleaning the fuck out of a toilet. Um, and I could do it. And I remember one time I was helping her [Chelsea] clean, I cleaned, I cleaned the toilet and I knew it was good cause then my mom's like crazy about like cleanliness and she thought it was good and Chelsea went and re-cleaned the

> toilet. And so, like that's just, I was trying to help her and save time, but if she's going to do it again and make it dirtier from her trying to clean it, like I'm not going to waste my time. So, uh, yeah, it's all her.

Chelsea rebutted, "I'm fine with you not cleaning. Like, I just don't like the way people clean. I think it's . . . a waste of time; the way they do it is not clean." Chelsea went on to discuss her standards and how Chace does not live up to these standards in the performance of specific household tasks:

> So, . . .you know how you clean like the silvers, like the spigot part of the tub or the toilet handle or whatever like it needs to shine like it should not [have] splotches on. His has splotches on it . . . And I think I micromanage, because I like things to be done in a certain way. And, like, for example, cleaning, if you're not using bleach, it's not clean. That's just something that I was taught growing up, so.

Chelsea and Chace clearly had different interpretations of what "clean" was and how one goes about cleaning. Chelsea's approach was to micromanage or *meddle* in Chace's cleaning of the toilet. Although a meddling strategy has been found to effective in getting partners to comply with requests to perform household tasks in some cases, in others it can trigger a demand/withdraw pattern that results in the "meddled with" partner withdrawing altogether from the requested household task (Wiesman et al., 2008, 353).

When one partner complains or expresses dissatisfaction with the other's actions, conflict can arise. Once it does, the couple has the opportunity to either discuss the issue or avoid it. If avoided, the couple may engage in what Christensen and Heavey (1990) describe as *negative communicative processes* whereby, "one partner pressures the other

through emotional demands, criticism, and complaints, while the other retreats through withdrawal, defensiveness, and passive inaction" (p. 73). The latter outcome seems indicative of how Chace handled Chelsea's demands:

> Then [with] snide remarks from her and then me, I guess it wasn't so much a negotiation, but I mean, you know, like when like your significant other is like, "hey, like you should do this". It's not, like, an invitation it's more like a do this or I'll be angry. Um, so I did that to avoid the anger and then she ended up re-cleaning or redoing the laundry or telling me I was doing it wrong. So, like, it seemed counter intuitive for me to go and try and help and then create more work even if that's what appeased her. You know?

The effect of using a *negative communication process* is that Chace reported withdrawing from specific household tasks. However, at first Chelsea suggested she was not fazed by Chace's task avoidance; she argued that it took more work to manage his housework effectiveness than it took to perform the tasks herself. But later, she revealed that she felt resentment and even behaved passively aggressive toward him because of behavior.

The outcomes of partner's differing standards and micro-management often are resentment and anger on both parties' parts. The amount of energy Chelsea exerted to manage Chace's household tasks performance may have felt significant, but perhaps not as substantial as the energy she exerted in performing the tasks herself alone along with the emotion labor of feeling resentful and even hostile towards Chace - originally for not living up to her standards and later for his nonperformance of household tasks.

Chelsea and Chace were not the only couple who faced challenges with micromanagement of housework effectiveness. Amber discussed her trepidations with Ashlym's performance:

> She has her moments where she's, like, "I do this, this and this" [but] I don't think she realizes how she doesn't do it thoroughly, so I have to go back, and do it and she doesn't see that part. . . We negotiate all the time because I [have] no choice but to do that with [her], because I can't get her to complete a full task.

Amber went further in discussing her dissatisfaction with a particular household task:

> I moved the furniture, I get out all the dust. I don't know, it builds up with dogs and I've seen it like her mom's house is the same way. Um, but she won't move furniture. She won't move things around.

Fionna described Frank's underperformance as occasions for teachable moments:

> I don't judge him. Like, when he under performs . . . like if he doesn't do it right, then I try to teach [him]. I mean I'm a teacher for a living, so I'm like, I try to teach him the right way to do it, but I don't try to, like, I don't really nag him or tell him like, "oh, you messed it up. That's not how you do it. Do it again" or whatever. Cause then it's like he's going to shut down and he's not gonna want to do it again. And I'm like, who is that really dis-servicing me or him? And so, I'm like, no, so I'm going to teach him the right way.

In the interviews, couples described a range of communication practices they used to manage the performance of household tasks. These practices, however, were not relegated to effectiveness alone, because time and efficiency also mattered in the larger theme of micromanagement.

Efficiency refers to whether the time it takes to perform a household task is deemed worthwhile. For some participants, the time it took to perform a task seemed as important as effectiveness in completing the task. For example, Chace provides a hypothetical scenario of Chelsea moving a water bottle from one end of a table to the other and his frustration with not only the way she does things but how if she did things differently she may save time:

> Sometimes she does things and does not make sense if that, like she'll be like, "hey, like I want to move this water bottle from this end of the table to this end of the table", and she'll move it like three inches forward and the four inches backward and it will fall off the table and then she'll move it over to the end. And you're just like, "I dunno what the fuck you're thinking", but I guess that's cool. Uhm, so I guess. . .that's frustrating [to] me and . . . this is where I get frustrated at her for like. . .doing something that like makes more work for her. And it's always the conversation of like, "let me do it". And I'm like, I'm trying to save you time.

When speaking about household tasks such as the dishes, Chace also alluded to how his evaluation that Chelsea performed household tasks inefficiently influenced his own (lack of) desire to contribute:

> And I'm like, I'm trying to save you time. And then eventually it just results in, like she'll be like, "I'm going to do it my way". . .I mean I'm coming up with positive intentions. . .So, um, she has sort of taken over that role. And, uh, I've, I've tried to help her before but our personalities clash. And I tell her she does things in a way that just is not conducive to actually doing them efficiently.

Chelsea and Chace evaluate the performance of household tasks using different criterion. The time spent on a given task, for Chace, determines whether or not the task was performed well; he equated spending long periods of time on household task performance with being inefficient and, therefore, ineffective. In contrast, Chelsea argued that Chace was ineffective and that she would perform any given household task for as much time as it took to do it correctly (in the ways she deemed correct). For both Chelsea and Chace, whether an investment of energy was "worthwhile" was important.

Participants also questioned whether it was sensible, in terms of energy expenditure, for an inexpert performer to "help" a more expert partner, something Chelsea brought up in her discussion of desk cleaning. Here she argues that it is not efficient for her to ask Chace for help.

> Um, I do clean up the desk. It's not that I don't want to ask him to do it, but it's just faster for me to do it myself than to ask him to come and clean up all this stuff. Um, in my mind it's faster and most of the time when I look at it, I am in the midst of doing something else. So, it was just like, okay, let me just put this in a pile and then go back to what I'm doing.

Frank also suggested that helping Fionna is less efficient, because his efforts added more work, that is a larger investment of her energy, than if she performed the task alone.

> So, I am, I mean, I'm willing to, I'm willing to lend a hand in the kitchen. I mean, if I'm being honest, I just kind of slow her down and she just kind of, you know, "just go on the couch, go watch TV, I'll take care of it myself," at least. I mean, I'm putting that effort to try so I can't complain, you know?

Thus, time spent, and energy exerted in not only the performance of household tasks but also the management of household tasks (requesting, sometimes repeatedly, help from partners and scheduling) are important influences on how couples make sense of their divisions of domestic labor.

Task Preference

Task preference emerged as another important theme that explained how couples understood the ways they allocated household tasks. *Task preference* describes one's predilection for performing some household tasks over others. The idea that partners felt more or less inclined to perform specific household tasks is a belief Ashlym endorsed. “Certain tasks that she don't like to do, I don't mind doing and vice versa. So, we tried to split it up that way because nobody wants to do chores they don't enjoy.” Two sub-themed emerged as influencers of task performance: *affect sensitivity* and *task size*.

Affect sensitivity describes a range of personal characteristics and perceptions that affect one's ability to perform a task. Some participants, like Ella and Ashlym, reported general reasons for not wanting to perform particular tasks. Ellen said “I don't really like cleaning too much, so I try to maintain [and to] pick up after myself” while Ashlym claimed, “Like, I've gotten better at that. It's just dishes is my main thing. I hate it. So, I knew, I knew she doesn't mind doing it. So, like I knew she would be okay doing it more”.

Other participants provided more detail. For example, when discussing what irritates him about sleeping on their bed without a bottom sheet, Chace explained:

> It does bother me when I'm sleeping and I, I feel my mattress like on my arm when I roll over or something cause then I'm just, I don't, it just like, I feel like

I've been conditioned, just have it like irritate me. So, having the, that not be on, uh, is frustrating and I, I'm actually the one who puts that on and I don't know, like I don't think Miranda cares cause she like sleeps on the mattress 90% of the time. I don't know how she does it, but uh, I always like make it a point to put it on, not for her sake, which is selfish, but just for my sanity and just making sure that's on both ends because I think sleeping anyway else is cruel and inhumane.

Because Chace has a particular sensitivity sleeping on a mattress, he is willing to put the bottom sheet on the bed. This is true even though he admitted to generally not finding cleaning very important:

Like the fitted sheet. . .I do that. But I mean aside from that, that was if that doesn't get done and laundry, like we're recycling underwear. . .so like whatever, it will get done, you know. . .there are more worldly things to be concerned about.

Although Chace claimed that Chelsea did not make the bed because she did not mind sleeping on the mattress, Chelsea said, “I won't make the bed intentionally. Because I feel like it's your fault that the sheet comes off”. Thus, Chelsea could refuse responsibility for bed making, because she knew that Chace’s sensitivity would motive him to do so.

Other couples also reported that individual levels of sensitivity, though not articulated, affected the performance of tasks. For example, Fionna mentioned having an aversion to cleaning the toilet:

Um, he's more reluctant to do the bathroom, and I don't know why. I'm just like, “just do the bathroom”. And he's like, “well, why are two people going to be

> working on the bathroom?" Like, cause I secretly don't want to clean the toilet. "You do it".

She also discussed how affect sensitivity increased her perception of the level of difficulty for tasks she and Frank divided:

> He does his own laundry, and he does the dishes a lot more than I do. So, I'll, I will commend him on that. He will, he does the dishes a lot more. Definitely. Um, he vacuums a lot of the time. Just, I mean, I don't want to say they're easy tasks, but they're more like simpler tasks, whereas like cleaning the bathroom, that's all me.

She describes tasks that Frank performs as "easy" and alludes to hers as being more challenging, likely because her affect sensibility makes the bathroom seem "harder," not because of the time commitment of her task was more.

Thus, one's sensibility toward a particular task contributes to whether partners perform that task, but it also influences the perceived degree of effort a task required. For instance, because Fionna's *affect sensitivity* is higher (meaning she has a stronger aversion to the task) for cleaning the toilet, she finds cleaning the bathroom to be more work than performing multiple tasks like laundry and dishes where her *affect sensitivity* is lower for these tasks. Simply put, it may take more mustering of effort to perform one task that one has a high *affect sensitivity* for than multiple other tasks with lower levels of *affect sensitivity*.

When discussing what tasks she preferred her partner to perform, Amber explained her issues with *affect sensitivity*:

> Maybe this is why I keep mentioning sweeping and mopping. I'm disgusted by feet and floors like immensely. . .the floor is like gross. And I think it's because I have an aunt that. . .she's disgusting. . .I went over her house. . .my slipper fell underneath her couch, and it came out soaking wet and I threw away the slippers.

Dana also provided detail regarding why she dislikes washing dishes by hand:

> I don't like handwashing dishes, it's something that does it. Like it's the texture to me of the dirty dishes. So like when we have a working dishwasher, I don't mind it, but right now I don't like the texture of the dirty dishes, so I like don't necessarily want to wash them. . .[Dominic] doesn't have a problem with the texture, so I don't mind asking him and if I don't, he's never, I don't believe he's ever come to me and been like, "I don't like doing this task".

She also mentioned her sensitivity to the texture of dirty floors:

> It's all, it's all about the textures with me. I don't like walking on like dirty floors. I don't like touching dirty dishes. So, like, if the floors aren't clean, then that would probably be something that I would be frustrated about.

Dominic described having concerns about the dishes as well, but his had more to do with them piling up and not being washed. He said, “I can't tolerate is the nastiness of the dishes if it's not done.” Dominic also discussed the relationship between level of affect sensitivity and the frequency with which each partner performed a task, like cleaning the bathroom and the cat boxes:

> Bathrooms are disgusting. So, I'm not gonna [say] "you do the bathroom and I'm just going to, you know, take out the trash". So, uh, I believe that like household tasks, I believe they should be half and half roughly. There was only one time that

> we had to [negotiate], she said, "you can either clean the bedroom or you can clean out the cat boxes" and that's not fun either. One of those is fine. And so, I was like, "okay, so if I do one will you do the other" and she goes "yes".

This example of negotiating between cleaning the bathroom or cleaning the cat boxes is indicative of the influence of *affect sensitivity* on task performance and partners' methods of negotiating it. Because, perhaps, cat boxes can be generally understood as unpleasant, the task of cleaning them or the bathroom were tantamount; even though the bathroom may have taken more time to clean, *affect sensitivity* levels were likely higher and therefore more effort may have been exerted to perform this task.

During their couple interview, Chelsea described her sensitivity to the dirty bathroom sink:

> Something that bothers me a lot if it's not done, is the sink being cleaned just the bathroom. If the bathroom gets filthy, that just freaks me out. . .I just don't like a dirty bathroom. And um, with the sinks the way that [they are], there's like a, the vent is right there so they get dusty, so they look filthy and I could have cleaned it yesterday, so I'm like cleaning the sink two or three times a week, but that's something that really bothers me.

Chace immediately remarked, "completely unnoticed by me. I didn't even know. I'm just letting you know. I know. I'm oblivious". Amber had complaints about Ashlym's lack of performance in household tasks which Ashlym acknowledged, but Ashlym also mentioned certain tasks that may have gone unnoticed by Amber; this may have been because Ashlym's level of *affect sensitivity* was higher than Amber's with regards to trash. Ashlym said:

> Once you ask her that she's going to go off soon as say I don't clean anything, but I do. . . She doesn't notice a lot of the things. . .like simple trash that is around on the corners or tables I pick up constantly cause trash really does bug me and it will look so much worse if I didn't.

Another important aspect of one's predilection for performing certain household tasks over others is *task size*.

Task size is one's perception of the difficulty of a specific household task impacted performance. For example, Ashlym mentioned her thoughts on cleaning in general:

> So, I hate cleaning. I hate it. Like I hate it if, if I lived by myself, I'd like to keep up with cleaning a lot better. But I guess in a way I get overwhelmed easily. And it's something I constantly try to work on.

She went further to describe specifically why she gets overwhelmed with a particular task:

> But like I said, if we just cleaned the dishes. . .right when we're done with them, that's fine. But, and then we say we're going to start doing that. And then she's like, oh, "I'll clean it tomorrow". I'm like, "okay". So, we never, never do that. So, then I get overwhelmed because I see the dishes and I'm like God I don't want to do with them.

Similarly, Amber mentioned, "I like cleaning. It's. . .calming to me but doing too much overwhelms me". The breadth and depth of the task seem to matter to couples, but what also impacts their assessment of size is whether the task is left undone for an extended period of time.

In addition, how partners view obligations outside of the home influences their perception of tasks inside of the home. For example, when talking about cleaning the bathroom, Chace remarked:

> [I]t's weird cause like I can sit down and write like a 20-page paper over the course of like 12 hours. Like constantly, but like small things like that I think are a waste of time for me to do. And that's not to say I . . .think that I'm better than her and that it's something that is more fitting for her to do.

Even though he acknowledged that some household tasks did not require much energy, he elevated the value his coursework and minimized the value housework such that a large work task felt less overwhelming than a relatively smaller household task.

Dana discussed her negotiations with Dominic in dividing household tasks:

> But it's more like in terms of bargaining, like if you did the dishes, all your laundry, like it's easier for me to be able to sit down and do laundry because I had the focus for it and . . .it's one less bigger task, like that in my house that's a bigger task. Laundry and dishes are gonna take more time. So, if I ask him to do a longer task, it just makes more sense for me to do a different longer task.

This was an interesting approach to the division of household tasks. Dana and Dominic seemed to base their division on the breadth, depth and level of *affect sensitivity*.

Summary

This study aimed to systematically examine newly cohabitating, dual-earner couples' understanding of divisions of household tasks. More specifically, this study addressed four research questions: What do household tasks mean for newly cohabitating couples? Are specific domains of housework more or less meaningful for newly

cohabitating couples? How do newly cohabiting couples conceptualize allocation of household tasks, and how do newly cohabitating couples view their current allocations of household tasks? Seven primary themes and twenty sub-themes emerged during data analysis of *line-by-line* and *focused coding*, which helped to better expose the processes of meaning-making, interpretations and decision-making regarding divisions of housework and to explore if, and if so how, dissymmetry in household tasks are understood in order to make better sense of why divisions of housework may still be unbalanced.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

> [The end of the road, in an almost literal sense, is the disappearance of the heroine altogether, as a separate self and the subject of her own story. The end of the road is togetherness, where the woman has no independent self to hide even in guilt; she exists only for and through her husband and children.

-Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, 1963.

Dissymmetry in the division of household tasks has been studied for decades, but to date scholars have not fully explained how and why it occurs. The current study adds to our understanding of this asymmetry by interrogating couples' individual and joint beliefs about domestic labor and their divisions of it. Specifically, it illustrates that how individuals in partnerships think and communicate about their day-to-day experiences with household task performance contributes to the difficulty of creating symmetrical divisions of housework in heterosexual couples.

Six themes emerged from in-depth analysis of the interview data: care, consistency, expectations, gender and upbringing, micro-management, and task size. The predominant thread connecting these themes is the tension between care and symmetry. As participants made clear in both their individual and joint interviews, they wanted to care for and be cared for by their partners through the performance of housework. However, as they and we come to understand, these demonstrations of giving and receiving care often contributed to dissymmetry in the division of household tasks. That is, the performance of housework as care frequently led to over-performance by one partner and under-performance by the other. At the same time, feeling that one carried the

burden of household labor left some participants feeling uncared for; thus, the balance of care and symmetry were difficult to negotiate for these couples.

Practical Implications

This study provides an initial framework for explaining why dissymmetry persists in many intimate relationships. Most participants said they believed household tasks should be divided 50/50, but overwhelmingly, participants also reported that a lack of symmetry in housework performance was common. Data from this study suggest that couples who actively, from the onset of their relationship and/or cohabitation, engage in discussions about what symmetry in the division of household task means to them are better equipped to work through the habits of mind and behavior that bring about dissymmetry in the first place. Wanting a 50/50 share of household tasks fits with the larger U.S American narrative about equality but doing so is challenging if couples' have not discussed what 50/50 means or looks like. Moreover, creating an equal distribution of domestic labor is complicated by participants' reports showing that care was inextricably linked to household labor contributions. Although participants could easily articulate the connection between caring and performing household labor, none reported discussing it with their partners, nor were they aware that it contributed to task asymmetry. Understanding the role of care and talking about its contributions to dissymmetry is likely a fundamental step toward creating symmetry - or accepting the inherent contradictions between the two.

Theoretical Implications

Over the past three decades, researcher have proposed theories to explain the division of household labor by focusing on singular factors, such as time availability,

gender performance, and resource allocation. Although some scholarly studies offer support for these theories, an equal amount has not found them to explain household labor division successfully. Furthermore, the theories have been unable to explain task allocation across tasks or with diverse participant populations. More importantly, to date none of them explicates how dissymmetry in performance occurs or can be ameliorated. The current study adds to our theoretical understanding by clarifying the important role that communication and sense making play in domestic labor division in addition to structural factors that may influence it. It also makes contributions to three primary division of domestic labor theories - time availability, gender performance, and the integrated theory of the division of domestic labor

In the present study, the pressures evident in couples' stories due to nonstandard work/school schedule clarify shortcomings of the time availability perspective and provide a way forward to revising the theory by complicating our understanding of how we should more precisely operationalize the meaning of time availability. Generally, the time availability perspective centers on an interplay between the time each partner works inside and outside of the home (Davis et al., 2007). It argues that partners make rational decisions regarding who does which household task based on the time they each "have available" (Coverman, 1985; South and Spitze, 1994). One of the weaknesses of the theory is that it does not address common dynamics found in contemporary families. That is, it does not account for the increased occurrence of multitasking, outsourcing household tasks, volunteer work, inflexibility/flexibility of schedules (Geist & Ruppanner, 2018), and what counts as leisure time. More specifically, it does not account for the fact it is difficult to identify how much available time people have or the stress

associated with accomplishing multiple tasks at the same time. Another shortcoming is that it does not consider that individuals may conceptualize leisure differently. What one person perceives as "leisure" the other may view as "work." For example, Ashlym mentioned several times throughout her interview that she worked 12-15hour shifts compared to Amber's part-time work. Ashlym reported that she perceived Amber's part-time schedule as being more conducive to performing more household tasks because Ashlym felt Amber had more available time. But, during their couple interview Amber said to Ashlym, "I may not work as much, or I may not do as much as you do at your job, but I'm still running around doing things all the time" and Amber went further to say, "So it's been frustrating learning to work my eight hours and do everything alone."

The present study reveals that all of the issues mentioned above contribute to couples' difficulty in completing household labor and understanding what equality or equity would look like in their relationships. Thus, the time availability perspective could be improved by considering that traditional explanations of time and leisure are unlikely to explain contemporary performances of household tasks.

In addition to the time availability perspective, the current study offers a way to extend the gender identity perspective. For example, previous research on divisions of household labor has focused on discrepancies in female "inside" or "frequent" work versus men's "outside" or "infrequent" household duties (Bernard, 1972; Vanek, 1974; Robinson & Godbey, 1997) such that women routinely report that their household duties occur more frequent and are more time consuming. The concept of *deep cleaning* that emerged from this study provides another lens through which to examine stereotypical male and female labor performance. That is, perhaps it is that both types of labor contain

aspects of the perfunctory and the in-depth. Thus, one could explore whether such activities as *deep cleaning* could be performed, or understood as such, outdoors. Or, to put differently, housework researchers could ask: "How do couples understand the meaning of deep cleaning inside and outside of the home?" Does *deep cleaning* outdoors equate to *deep cleaning* indoors? Although the idea of sex-based inside/outside labor performance is well documented, focusing on the "deep work" of outside tasks could change our understanding of the degree of dissymmetry in couples' household work (Coltrane, 2000; Greenstein, 2000, 2009; Hook, 2006; Knudsen and Waerness, 2008).

Finally, this study has implications for the most recent theory of housework, the integrated theory of the division of domestic labor (Alberts et al., 2011). The findings presented her add dimension to some parts of the theory and offer the first study of another. For example, the concept of *affect sensitivity* and *threshold sensitivity* are revealed to be complementary, but also distinct, influences how domestic tasks are divided. *Threshold sensitivity* (Alberts et al., 2011) is the level of disorder an individual can tolerate before feeling motived to perform a task. A*ffect sensibility* refers to individuals' sensory sensitivity to a task that affect their ability to perform it. Thus, *affect sensibility* describes more visceral, affective states – feelings of disgust or enjoyment - for particular tasks. *Threshold sensitivity* (or response threshold), on the other hand, is more of cognitive response to stimuli - household tasks that are left undone (Knight, Alberts, 2018). The two responses are connected in that affect sensibility can affect threshold sensitivity. That is, individuals' thresholds may be lowered if they believe that waiting longer to perform a task will increase their affect sensibility. Alberts et al. (2011) mention that research participants directly stated that being disturbed by the smell of

garbage or disgusted by the feel of sticky floors shapes their thresholds for these tasks, and experiencing these states motives them to perform the tasks. Thus, understanding affect sensibility helps explain individuals' threshold levels.

In addition, an important component of the integrated theory, but one that has not previously been examined is the role of sense making in the division of domestic labor. Findings from this study extend the explanatory and predictive power of the theory and move us closer to a comprehensive theory of the division of housework.

Ultimately, as housework scholars, we build systems of inquiry, models and measures, but if we are relying on single theories or perspectives to describe a complex phenomenon such as housework, we may remain unable to explain why dissymmetry persists in the division of household tasks.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study. One of the most apparent limitations is the inability to extrapolate across broader spectrums of individuals, cultures, and situations of housework from these data. Another related limitation was the size of the participant pool; because of this, generalizability is not possible. Also because of the narrow scope of the study, other categories of analysis were not included, such as ethnic origin, nationality and socioeconomic status, though these factors may be important in explaining dissymmetry in the performance of household tasks. Relatedly, participants in the study primarily embraced western values, traditions and beliefs, which directly affected the results. For example, the expectation that couples would or should divide household tasks "50/50" may be far less common in non-western cultures. Another limitation was that interviews were conducted both in person and via video conference,

which could have had an impact on participant responses. In addition, impression management may have influenced respondents' answers, which may have impacted the verifiability and reliability of data. Despite rigorous efforts to minimize my own bias, my positionality may have affected data collection and the analysis. Finally, because I wanted to respond to both methodological and theoretical gaps in the housework literature, the criteria for inclusion into this study were quite stringent. This was highly restrictive in terms of the number of couples who not only were willing to participate in the study but who also met the inclusion criteria.

Future Research

I provided a brief analysis of divisions of household tasks in this dissertation. What emerged were three central themes that have yet to be exposed in housework studies: care, symmetry, and meaning making. Findings from this study suggest that participants struggled to articulate what housework meant to them. Building from a framework of care, symmetry, and the processes of meaning-making, housework scholars may be afforded a new and exciting set of theoretical tools to aid in explaining dissymmetry in the division of household tasks that seems to endure in many households.

Although the current study revealed several important aspects of *care,* it was unable to examine, specifically, the concepts of emotion labor and cognitive load. That is, household responsibilities include more than the physical tasks examined in this study. The work of making and managing a home also includes the energy, time, and cognitive effort to track what tasks need to be performed, what tools or supplies need to be made available, so the tasks can be completed, and coordination of any external help needed to facilitate task performance. Further, as alluded to throughout the results but not directly

identified as a "task," care work also means managing one's own and other's emotions, needs, and expectations around the performance of household labor. Examining these concepts, alongside *care*, may help housework scholars better explain dissymmetry in household tasks. Moreover, examining couples' attitudes and experiences, including concepts such as cognitive load and emotional labor, within varied ethnic contexts will allow us to understand how dissymmetry is conceptualized in cultures that do not subscribe to the view that household tasks should be split "50/50." Additionally, building from the current study and previous studies that have tested the integrated theory of domestic labor, focusing on both the processes of meaning making and sense making may further expand our understanding of dissymmetry of housework.

Housework scholars may also benefit from carefully exploring what equal/equitable divisions of household tasks mean for couples. Specifically, housework scholars may respond to some findings from the current study on manifold symmetry by examining whether or not the concept of "equal" is mediated by other factors (e.g., doing the dishes may not equate to mopping the floor if one task is perceived as more or less unpleasant, which may also relate to affect sensitivity). Finally, by using a larger sample size and a longitudinal design, housework scholars may respond to the limitations of the current research to advance our understanding of the meaning couples ascribe to the idea of splitting tasks "50/50."

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APPENDIX A

IINDIVIDUAL'S INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview #_____
Date_____/_____/_____

Task Performance Interview Protocol

Individuals' Interview Protocol (Interviews 1 & 2)
Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Jay Taylor, and I am a graduate student at Arizona State University conducting interviews in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my PhD in human communication. The purpose of this study is to better understand couples' perception of how tasks around their home are divided between them.

Thank you for your interest. This interview will take roughly 30-45 minutes for each individual and for the two of you as a couple, for a total of 90 to135 minutes. I will start by covering four general procedures. Then, I will ask six general questions, followed by questions that will be more open-ended. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential.

But before we begin, first, I need to reaffirm that you qualify to be part of the study:

SELECTION CRITERIA
You are between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.
You are in an unmarried partnership
You are newly *cohabitating with your partner (<1 year to 2 years)
You have no children living in the home
You are employed full time and have a partner who is employed full time (35 hours a week or more of paid work outside of the home)
*For the purposes of this study, "cohabitation" will be defined as: dwelling together continuously and openly in an intimate relationship with another person, regardless of the sex of the other person.

[*Note: Participant must meet all of these criteria. If not, thank them for their interest and do not move on*]

Thank you.

CONSENT PROCESS
Second, I have a copy of the letter that you previously read and signed which explains the purpose of the study and your rights as a participant in the study. If you have any additional questions about this document, please let me know. [*Give them time to re-read their signed consent form*] Do you have any questions about the study before we begin?

[*Note: If on Skype, ask them to locate their online signed consent form and review if they have any questions.*]

COMPENSATION
Third, you will receive monetary compensation for your participation in this study. Upon completing these interviews, I will provide you with a $30 Visa gift card. [*Note: If on Skype, ask them to what email their virtual Visa gift card should be sent*].

RECORDING
Fourth, I am also asking your permission to record the interview. Only the research team will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be deleted immediately after being transcribed, and any published quotes will be anonymous. To protect your identity, please refrain from using names or other identifying information during the interview. Let me know if, at any time, you do not want to be recorded and I will stop.

I want to remind you that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or return a page, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

[*Turn recorder on now*]

PROBES throughout: [*examples*]
This is really helpful.
Can you elaborate on that a bit more?
What happened then?

Open-Ended Questions: [**These will be asked of each participant separately and as a couple; the couple interviews are designed to help researchers understand how couples individually and collectively create meaning around task performance in their homes.**]

Please describe your experience of cohabitation. Throughout this interview I will be using the term "cohabitation" to mean dwelling together continuously and openly in an intimate relationship with another person, regardless of the sex of the other person.

Can you describe what you thought cohabitation would be like in comparison to what it has actually been?

In terms of household tasks, can you tell me about your expectations for yourself as a cohabitating partner?
What are your "shoulds"?

Where do these expectations come from?

In terms of household tasks, can you tell me about your expectations of your partner? What are your "shoulds?" Where do your expectations come from?

Did you and your partner discuss your expectations for allocating household tasks before moving in together?

Can you tell me about a time when you had to negotiate the division of household tasks with your partner?

Can you tell me some things that annoy you with regard to the division household tasks? Are there tasks that your partner either underperforms or does not perform at all?

How do feel you about his/her housework performance?

What would you like to see change in how housework occurs in your home?

Are there any household tasks that if they were left undone you would find difficult to tolerate it?

Can you describe to me what you see as most important about household tasks?

Can you recall a time in the last week that you and your partner discussed household tasks?

On a scale from 1-5(5 being very satisfied and 0 being very dissatisfied) please rate your overall satisfaction with you and your partner's housework arrangement.

Thank you so much for your time and insight!

[*Provide the in-person interview participants with the Visa gift card now. If on Skype, inform them you will email the virtual Visa gift card to them before the end of the day.*]

***** If participant wishes to discontinue study, ask if they would be willing to share why:**

APPENDIX B

COUPLE'S INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Couples' Interview Protocol (Interview 3)

PROBES throughout: [*examples*]
This is really helpful.
Can you elaborate on that a bit more?
What happened then?

How long have the two of you cohabitated?

Whose residence did you choose to share

How did you make this decision?

Open-Ended Questions: [These will be asked of each participant separately and as a couple; the couple interviews are designed to help researchers understand how couples individually and collectively create meaning around task performance in their homes..]

Please describe your experience of cohabitation. Throughout this interview I will be using the term "cohabitation" to mean dwelling together continuously and openly in an intimate relationship with another person, regardless of the sex of the other person.

Can you describe what you thought cohabitation would be like in comparison to what it has actually been?

In terms of household duties, can you tell me about your expectations for yourself as a cohabitating partner?

What are your "shoulds"?

Where do these expectations come from?

In terms of household duties, can you tell me about your expectations of your partner? What are your "shoulds?" Where do your expectations come from?

Did the two of you discuss your expectations for allocating household tasks before moving in together?

Can you tell me about a time when the two of you had to negotiate the division of household tasks with your partner?

Can you tell me some things that annoy you with regard to the division of household tasks?
What would you like to see change in how housework occurs in your home?

Are there any household tasks that if they were left undone you would find difficult to tolerate it?

Can you describe to me what you see as most important about household tasks?

Can you recall a time in the last week that the two of you discussed household tasks?

On a scale from 1-5 (5 being very satisfied and 0 being very dissatisfied) please rate your overall satisfaction with your current housework arrangement.

Thank you so much for your time and insight!

[*Provide the in-person interview participants with the Visa gift card now. If on Skype, inform them you will email the virtual Visa gift card to them before the end of the day.*]

*** If participant wishes to discontinue study, ask if they would be willing to share why:

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT FLYER


RESEARCH STUDY
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED
The purpose of this study is to learn more about couples' perceptions about performance tasks around the house.
To be included in this study, you must meet the following criteria:
1) You are between the ages of 18 and 24 years old
2) You are in an unmarried partnership
3) You are newly *cohabitating with your partner (<1 year-2 years)
4) You have no children living in the home
5) You are employed full time and have a partner who is employed full time (35 hours a week or more of paid work outside of the home)
*For the purposes of this study, "cohabitation" will be defined as: dwelling together continuously and openly in an intimate relationship with another person, regardless of the sex of the other person.
This is an interview study with 3 parts: individual interviews and a couple interview of 30 to 45 minutes each, for a total of 90 to 135 minutes.
Participants each will be compensated with a $30 Visa gift card for participating in this study
PLEASE EMAIL JAY TAYLOR IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY, AND/OR IF YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO MEETS THE CRITERIA
jrtaylo3@asu.edu

116

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Recruitment Script

Meaning, Perception and Decision-Making: Examining Divisions of Housework in Newly Cohabitating Dual-Earner Couples

My name is Jay Taylor, and I am a graduate student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. I am studying how recently-cohabitating couples understand and talk about performing tasks around the house. _.

To be included in the study, you must meet the following criteria:

1. You are between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.
2. You are in an unmarried partnership
3. You are newly *cohabitating with your partner (<1 year to2 years)
4. You have no children living in the home
5. You are employed full time and have a partner who is employed full time (35 hours a week or more of paid work outside of the home)

*For the purposes of this study, "cohabitation" will be defined as: dwelling together continuously and openly in an intimate relationship with another person, regardless of the sex of the other person.

If you have any questions about whether you meet the qualifications for this study, please feel free to email me at jrtaylo3@asu.edu

If you meet the criteria listed above, you may qualify to take part in an interview study and you may be emailed by the lead researcher to schedule a time, date and location for the interviews. I will conduct three interviews in total and they are as follows: interview 1-you, interview 2-your partner, interview 3-you and your partner together. For the first and second interviews I, will ask general demographic questions including age, race ethnicity, length of cohabitation, employment status (full time, >35 hours/week), whose domicile you and your partner chose to share, and how you and your partner decided this. Second, you will be asked to describe what you thought cohabitation would be like compared to how it actually is. Third, I will ask you general questions about task performance in your home. For the couple interview, I will ask similar questions to the individual interviews. I will conduct three interviews in total, which will include you and your partner being interviewed separately and then together. Each interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes, for a total of 90 to 135 minutes. All interviews will take place a) in a private office on the West campus of Arizona State University, b) in another location of your choosing, c) online via the video software Skype. Interviews will be audio recorded, but all responses to these interview questions will be kept confidential, and at no time will your identity be revealed in the analysis and/or reporting of research results.

Your participation is completely voluntary. At any time throughout the interview you may choose not to answer specific question(s), and you are free to leave at any time if you would like to do so.

If all three interviews are completed in full, each participant will receive a $30 Visa gift card.

Thank you for considering being a part of this study.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at jrtaylo3@asu.edu and include the following in the subject line: "Task Performance Study".

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Meaning, Perception and Decision-Making: Understanding Task Performance in Newly Cohabitating Dual-Earner Couples

My name is Jay Taylor, and I am a graduate student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. I am studying meaning-making about task performance around the home between newly cohabitating couples.

To be included in the study, you must meet the following criteria:

1. You are between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.
2. You are in an unmarried partnership
3. You are newly *cohabitating with your partner (<1 year-2 years)
4. You have no children living in the home
5. You are employed full time and have a partner who is employed full time (35 hours a week or more of paid work outside of the home)

*For the purposes of this study, "cohabitation" will be defined as: dwelling together continuously and openly in an intimate relationship with another person, regardless of the sex of the other person.

If you do not meet the above criteria, you do not qualify for this particular study and should not proceed.

If you meet the criteria listed above, you may qualify to take part in an interview study, and you may be emailed by the lead researcher to schedule a time, date and location for the interviews. I will conduct three interviews in total, which will include you and your partner being interviewed separately and then together. Each interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes, for a total of 90 to 135 minutes. All interviews will take place a) in a private office on the West campus of Arizona State University, b) in another location of your choosing, c) online via the video software Skype. If you choose a Skype interview, please note you should be in a private location which allows no interruption from others during the interview.

I am also asking your permission to record the interview. Only the research team will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be deleted immediately after being transcribed, and any published quotes will be anonymous. To protect your identity, please refrain from using names or other identifying information during the interview. Let me know if, at any time, you do not want to be recorded and I will stop.

The information I obtain in this study will be kept strictly confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym, and your name will not be tied to any of your answers. Your individual and couple interviews will be linked to one another through your pseudonyms, and responses to all three interviews (yours, your partner's and your couple interview) will be stored separately from the names provided on the consent forms. The <u>only</u> place your name will appear is on this consent form, and all consent forms will be stored in a separate location from your responses. We will not share your individual answers with your partner, and the only individuals with access to your interview responses will be the researchers. Results will be used in a doctoral dissertation and possibly in future presentations at academic conferences and publications in refereed academic journals. The names used in all of these venues will be changed to pseudonyms and will not reflect your identity in any way.

APPENDIX F

IRB EXEMPTION

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Janet Alberts

Human Communication, Hugh Downs School of
480/965-5095
JESS.ALBERTS@asu.edu

Dear Janet Alberts:

On 1/23/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Meaning, Perception and Decision-Making: Examining Divisions of Housework in Newly Cohabitating Dual-Earner Couples
Investigator:	Janet Alberts
IRB ID:	STUDY00009496
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Consent_Taylor_Diss (4) jka.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Recruitment Script_Taylor_Diss(4).pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Individuals' Interview Protocol_Taylor_Diss(1).pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Couples' Interview Protocol (1).pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Recruitment_Flyer_Taylor_Diss(2) jka 1-19-19.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • HRP-503a, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 1/23/2019.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Jameien Taylor
Jameien Taylor